PDC 58370 9

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

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By Land and By Sea

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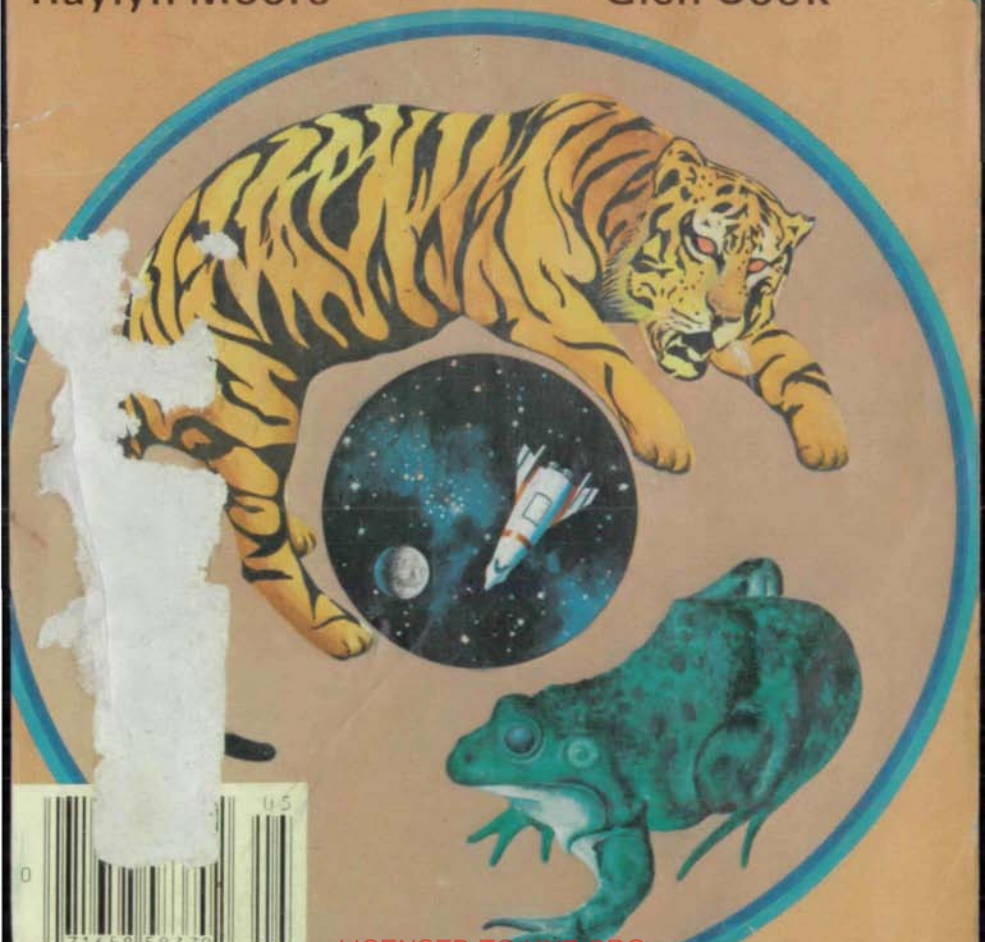

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Cover by Rick Sternbach for "King Frog"

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 54; No. 5, Whole No. 324, May, 1978. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.25 per copy. Annual subscription $12.50; $14.50 outside of the U.S. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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We published Richard Olin's "Lil, Rorrity and A Foamin' Sea of Steam Beer" in our March 1966 issue. Since then, Mr. Olin tells us that he's lived in San Francisco, Central America, San Diego and eventually wound up in Alaska in 1974, where he has decided to stay. He says that his new story is based on an ancient Chinese children's tale. And a very old and enduring principle of psychological warfare.

King Frog

by RICHARD OLIN

Entranced by the old storyteller's web of fantasy, the children sat beside the pond; not one was conscious of the breeze that gently set the leaves in motion or danced in ripples over the pond and carved bright facets in the green jewel of the water. Jeremy, who was seven and self-conscious as both a foreigner and guest, hastened to observe the red carp that swam in droves over the pool's algae-covered bottom. Like him, and the gently soughing willows, the fish had once come from Earth. He felt kinship in that. And his burgeoning scientific attitude was quick to note that the fish had adapted to a nonterran environment without any visible mutations.

However even Earth fish grow boring after a time, and it was only a short while before he found himself as raptly absorbed as the others. The storyteller was very good.

Morning passed into afternoon. The shadows of the great, transplanted trees lengthened across the stream. The storyteller smiled and held up one hand in gentle protest. His expression did not change; Jeremy wondered if his wrinkled, old-man's face was not a mask — so permanent seemed its stamp of merry good humor.

"One story more," the teller informed his audience. "And then I must leave till the next time. One story. Who shall pick it?"

Suddenly uncomfortable, Jeremy realized the old man's tortoise-like gaze was resting expectantly on him.

Feeling warmth flood his face, Jeremy cast desperately about for some appropriate response. Finding none, he shrugged. "I can't," he blurted out. "I can't pick it because I don't *know* any stories."

It was the truth. But, as it turned out, it was also the very

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worst thing he could have found to say.

After an incredulous moment of silence, the other children burst into whoops of pealing laughter. Jeremy felt utterly miserable.

"I don't care!" he stormed at the storyteller. "Tell any story you want!"

His father, the Terran alliance's spokesman to this benighted, highly independent speck of a planet, might disapprove. (His father's role in an earlier, more formal era might be accurately termed that of an ambassador.) Jeremy was beyond such considerations.

He came from Earth, mankind's home. He would not be laughed at!

Entirely undismayed, the venerable teller of tales held up his other hand. "It is impolite to laugh at one who has traveled so far to share his presence with our own."

The children fell silent.

Winking, the old man continued. "I am troubled, for 'tis rightly said by Ai Sung: 'Fools puff up like frogs in rain, and for all their ignorance are eager to give counsel to the wise.'"

Solemnly, a boy close in age to Jeremy's own ducked his head once and formally replied: "But as well it is spoken that the sage is encountered more often in the humblest guise and abode. O teller of tales, did you not say truly — 'The wise heart most often hides behind the fool's face?'"

"That I said, and it is a thing of truth. For now — oh, woe! I suddenly perceive that I am the one who is a fool! It must be that our young guest has sat with us out of mere politeness all this day. A person so well-traveled must of necessity know many tales." He allowed time for this thought to sink in. "Perhaps it is he who should sit and discourse on wisdom and philosophy, and I who should sit quietly and listen."

He made this last statement with a low bow in Jeremy's direction. Despite the handicaps of age and the fact he was seated cross-legged in the sand, he performed the bow with a supple flourish. Here and there in his audience a child tittered.

Red-faced and angry, Jeremy got to his feet.

"If you are making fun of me, you can stop! The truth is as I have said — I don't know any stories. The data spools in my father's yacht don't include fiction. He prefers I apply my attention to — ah, to more scientific and practical information."

His stumble was caused by a last-moment substitution of words. He'd been about to say that his father didn't like him wasting time on the literature of primitive planetary societies.

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To smooth out the pause and allay suspicion, he added: "My father doesn't like fiction."

"So? What a strange way to raise a child!" The story man's wizened face was an instant mirror of sincere compassion. "You may have gathered we hold a view that is almost the exact opposite. As to education — why, most of the families of Lin seem to be quite happy with *me*. I am the schoolhouse, the principal and teaching staff —" He bowed, a ducking bob that was sprightly and comic. "And most of what I teach is remembered because it is *fun*.

"Of course we are — deliberately — a nontechnical world. Our culture might be described as a stochastic medley which can utilize just about anything from previous human eras. We apply Confucian ethics and gestalt psychology with equal benefit. By the way — just what subjects does the noble ambassador, your father, insist you learn?"

Jeremy didn't have to think. He rattled off the list of subjects. "Astronomy. Galactic navigation. Evolution of planets and life forms. Quantum mechanics. Mechanics of cosmo-neutrino particle exchange. Life systems and support under high-magnitude acceleration change —" He stopped, though he was nowhere near finished. The storyteller's face had crumpled into a complex map of astonishment, confusion and bewilderment. He bowed, holding both hands out in supplication.

— The gesture was not lost on Jeremy's father, who gazed abstractedly on the scene through one wide window of his host's house. The merchant Han smiled, anticipating his guest's reaction. With a silence that was meaningful, the trader offered more red plum wine from the delicate glass container. When it was refused, he smiled deprecatorily — "It is but poor wine."

"That's a lie, Han," the guest from Earth said bluntly. "It probably is the best vintage and year in Yuan province. What *is* that old tramp doing? Making mind-games to baffle my son?"

Han grinned. He relished Gilbert Ramsey's directness. "Is it possible? I had thought your son so sturdily trained that no danger might assail him —"

"In a fight, he can whip any two adults. Provided they aren't knowledgeable in the, ah, skills at which he's trained." Ramsey's voice was a growl. "But that doesn't make him immune to other, more subtle types of attack. Psychological skills. Such as the, ah, educators of Lin are justly said to be good at."

Han's face went entirely sober. "Fear not, my friend. Your son is not in danger. I would not permit it

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while you are under my roof." With elaborate casualness the merchant rose and strolled over to view the wide, well-tended gardens.

"Much may be said for our system of education," Han said reflectively. "For one, it is designed to give the students certain principles — symbolic, logical relationships — which they incorporate into their own personalities at almost the reflexive level...."

"Through the vehicle of childhood fables?" Ramsey, though too polite to snort, clearly indicated by voice and manner that he'd like to. "Terran education also incorporates principles of conduct. We project information through a wide array of channels. Through holographic presentations, audiovisual displays, memory phase units and —"

"To be sure," said the merchant Han smoothly. "But with us there is one difference. You teach your children everything, hoping that someday at least some of it will be of use to them. We, on the contrary, teach only what we know the child will *need*."

— And bending far over, the gesture was completed — The story man's torso lay almost supine. He snapped erect. "Highly learned person," he quavered in a voice wobbling with alarm, "I must beseech you: please go no further. I am shamed and chagrined. For, of all the words you have directed at me, I confess I've not understood so much as one in ten!"

The ring of children regarded him gravely. But, to Jeremy, whose own face was flaming, he could not tell if their blank faces hid dislike, contempt, or merely a polite indifference.

"Astrogation and the rest are necessary subjects for anyone who wants to be a spacefarer. Someday I will be a pilot. And have my own ship." His chest expanded and chin lifted at the thought.

"Of a certainty, noble sir. I see such a culmination for yourself as surely as I see the tree, full-branched and tall, within the opening seed. But tell me, are you not fearful of danger — strange peril, perhaps attack? The Universe is a wide and often a frightening place."

Jeremy laughed. "Our yacht is armed. And screened. On the ground I can use a variety of weapons, or just my hands. Father insists I train in our ship's gym every day."

Around him, the ring of faces suddenly came alive. All registered one expression; it was shock. Even the story man lost some of his composure, for he winced.

Jeremy wished then he'd been struck dumb — or had at least conveniently bitten his tongue. He remembered too late that among the social prohibitions of Lin one of the

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strongest and oldest was an elaborate code of courtesy that rested firmly on the dictum of nonviolence. The people of Lin were practical enough to realize the need for the professional soldier, but he ranked bottom on the scale of gainful occupations — below even that of a butcher.

Bobbing once, the storyteller shook his head and started to gather up his few belongings. "Great warrior, if this be true, there remains nothing I or my art may teach you. Humbly I take up my robe and depart...."

Before Jeremy could make up his mind to protest, the teacher had slipped on his straw sandals and was reaching about to collect his other things.

"Soo Chow!" It was the eldest son of the merchant. "May I remind you — this person is the son of one who at present is my father's guest."

As the old man paused, the boy expertly tossed a heavy coin. It was silver. With a ring it landed squarely in the offering bowl, coming to rest atop the smaller coins stamped from brass, Said the boy, "Tell him the best story you know!"

Enigmatic, void of expression, the teller of tales resumed his position beside the bowl and folded robe. Then he smiled. "Very well. Young traveler who strides stars as others use rocks to step across a pond . . . I shall tell you a story.

"This is a tale that is very old. Indeed, it comes originally from Earth...." He quirked one eyebrow, inviting a response.

Jeremy sat down. He smiled. "I also come from Earth. But I am not old."

"Granted. This tale comes from an ancient place, a Terran country once known as 'China.'"

"Now that is a name I have never heard. What part of the Earth was it? It must have been before the Alliance."

"Long before," was the simple assent.

"But —"

Han's eldest son explained. "You now call most of it by the title 'Eastern Industrial Sector.' Pay no attention. Soo Chow likes to be mysterious sometimes."

"That is quite so, young prince." With a twinkle, the storyteller continued. "To begin, then. This story concerns two Terran animals — a tiger and a frog. It happened one day when all the worlds were still very young...."

— It is inconceivable (thought Pilot Jerry Ramsey) that a ship can be pulled without warning from full-drive back into practically a standstill in normal space. For one thing, what about the discrepancy in relative velocities?

Even in the weird formulas that

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applied inside the hypershape continuum his ship had been traveling at multiples of light-speed. Now, and with practically no transition, he was coasting — engines and drive shut down while the ship itself seemed parked in an ellipse. One focal point of the elliptic orbit was occupied by a barely visible and very small (planetoid range) object that nonetheless was super dense.

He put one screen on visual display and increased magnification. The dense object was a dwarf, of course. A fitful glow moved over its surface, confirming his suspicions. The matter within the stellar clinker was now so dense that even light must battle to escape. Soon (in the terms of astronomical time) the event horizon would be formed with the actual mass collapsing deeper and deeper into the core of a black hole. Eventually, when the stress of the space-time fabric itself grew too great, the hole itself would disappear ... forming its own microcontinuum somewhere off the scale of the overlapping universes ... The thought produced an idea.

Suppose they had been captured? The gravity fields of very large or very dense objects produced stress lines in hyper as well as normal space. It was a useful fact that allowed ultralight ships to navigate — and let them re-enter space at their destination, rather than a spiral arm or galaxy away.

He addressed the computer. "Jay-jay, please run up a simulation for me. Assume our relative mass in drive, moving along the vector coordinates we were following when we dropped out of the plus-cee continuum. Now estimate the stress pocket likely to be brought into being by that...." He rapidly gave the J-class ship computer the problem and waited the few seconds needed while the machine brought data up from its storage center, ran up and solved a whole series of differential equations and flashed the sequence in luminous green graphs, numerals and formulas on the screen. The voice of the J-class vocalizer answered him.

"It checks out, Jer —" the computer decided. Jay-jay was laconic by design. Jerry appreciated the vocalizer; it furnished that all-important sound of another human voice. But he certainly didn't want a machine that was voluble and chatty.

"Well, that would explain the sizable amount of energy that vanished," Jerry said. "Some of it was transferred to the dwarf, and the rest, I suppose, was dissipated throughout the volumes of normal and hyperspace." He wondered if the gift of new energy would delay the core's ultimate collapse. Perhaps, though the final outcome was still inevitable —

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"Something else, boss."

"There is?"

"Yes. Counting two, three — now five objects of artificial origin around the main body. They appear to be spaceships."

The screen magnified the hull of one then expanded to bring three more into view. All details were simulated from instrument readout, of course. The dwarf did not emit enough light for the ships to be visible.

All the craft appeared to be derelicts, voluntarily abandoned. But what had the crews done? Stepped out into space?

"Jay-jay, why don't we start our engines and get out of here?"

"Good idea — except for one thing. I just picked up two new blips. One big, one small. And they're coming here. Fast."

— In the garden of Han on the planet Lin, a human voice awoke gravel echoes as it skillfully evoked an ancient hunting animal's roar. "I am Tang Soo, the tiger! Little green animal, who are *you?*"

Expertly mimicking the startled frog, the storyteller showed the amphibian's wits when he replied in an equally belligerent but higher tone: "I am King Frog.... And I eat tigers for breakfast!"

"Oh?" came the skeptical reply. "Would you care to try *this* tiger for lunch?"

"Thank you, no. I've eaten three this morning, and I'm still quite full. But I *am* bored. I will challenge you — let's see — yes, I will challenge you to a feat of strength. Let us see which of us can leap farthest across that stream."

"Done!" agreed the tiger with a snarling laugh which said clearly he was already certain of victory.

To young Jeremy Ramsey it seemed he could actually see the sun through the trees, the tawny coat of the tiger and the green little frog as it made quick, intelligent responses.

The story rolled on.

The two blips resolved themselves into a pair of heavily armed ships. And, since they showed no signs of any official insignia, it was very probably they were raiders.

Savoring the irony, Jerry repeated from the Space Merchants' Manual: *"Since the invention of the plus-cee drive and the use of other continuums, no armed attack has been possible on any merchant space vessel."* It was true, of course. In hyperspace you couldn't intercept a ship because it had no real location. And no merchant came out into normal space until he was at his destination — which was generally close to a friendly and well-fortified planet.

"However they didn't think of this," he said. "We'll have to

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inform them of the oversight. When we get back," he added with conscious optimism.

"Tell me, Jay-jay, do you think we can outrun them?"

"Not a chance."

"And we can't fight. I don't think there's anything remotely like a weapon on this ship, unless you count the galley's kitchen laser. So what does that leave us?"

"Surrender," said the computer.

"True." Apparently the other ships caught here had come to a similar conclusion; it explained the silent, open hatches. But —

"How safe would we be if we gave up?"

"No data."

"Not very damn safe at all is my guess. What's our cargo manifest...? I don't suppose we could ransom ourselves with jewels or scarce medicines and machine parts?"

"Routine consignment. Mail, entertainment tapes and holo-projectors for Port Joy."

"Great!" he exclaimed. "Well, I guess they'll get a laugh or two after they board us.."

"I don't think so. Neither species is human."

"Huh? How did you learn that?"

"I'm listening to their communications channel. The equipment is crude and not well shielded. When they get closer I'll probably be able to tap their bridge and ship conversations."

Jerry stared for a second open-mouthed. Sometimes, the J-class was *too* laconic. "Well, put them on, for pete's sake! Let's hear what they are saying!"

The snarl of a creature resembling a bobcat screamed from the speaker. It was answered curtly with a series of snuffling glottals that might have issued from a Terran wart hog.

Over the din, Jerry shouted, "Correction — correction! Give me the closest *translated* version of what they are saying!"

There was a moment of silence.

Two human voices began to speak without emotion. The pace was uneven and somewhat broken, too. It was caused by time lags as the translation-circuits scanned memory and camed up with the closest approximations.

"..don't think you can (pause) get away with it! I'm not (pause) any old (untranslatable) remnant of garbage to be (pause) misused. I won't —"

"You bellyache all the time (pause). You got first choice of the loot when we (pause) hit the passenger ship last time! And that hasn't been over two (unknown time unit) ago!"

"That's what you always say! But who is it (pause) that muscles in

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and takes the (untranslatable) right off the top of the (longer pause) cream jug? It's you, every time! If you won't split up the loot fifty-fifty then (pause), we'll just (pause) pack up and split!"

"Fifty-fifty?!?" came the response. Even through the deadening translator, the voice was outraged. "Listen, shrimp! Who carries the overhead? (pause) Who has all the z-wwaaAARRK!!—"

The transmission suddenly ended.

"What happened?" Jerry wanted to know.

"They're coming in over the primary, and the occlusion also damps the signal. We'll receive them loud and clear once they are this side of the dwarf."

"How long before the intercept?"

"Not long." The J-class reeled off a quantity equal to two standard ship hours plus a few standard minutes.

"Can we evade? Perhaps one of these hulks could hide our blip. They can't see us right now —" It seemed a very weak plan. Even if they made the raiding ships look behind every empty hull, it would only be a matter of time before....

Jerry snapped erect. He'd thought of something better.

"Jay-jay! You said we were carrying hologram projectors this trip." (Now just grant us one little piece of luck, he thought.) "Those wouldn't be the small, home-size models, by any chance?"

"No. These are the big stadium models."

"Good! How large an image do they throw?"

"Don't have any idea. Wait. About a third of a cubic kilometer."

"Perfect."

Rapidly, Jerry sketched out for the J-class what he proposed they do. At one point, the computer protested. "But, boss, those machines are heavy! And, besides, they're all crated up for flight!"

"Then I'll have to uncrate some of them! Don't worry, the company insurance will cover any loss. Provided we get back to report it."

"DONE!" It was a truly ferocious roar. The storyteller continued: "But though the tiger was large and proud of his strength, the little frog was undismayed. As the tiger whirled, digging in his claws to leap from the stream bank, the frog grabbed the tip of the tiger's tail in his mouth. *So*, when the tiger landed far across on the opposite bank — the frog continued, sailing over his head and landing several meters beyond...."

Apparently there had been a falling out among thieves. Jerry watched the changing positions of the two blips. The lighter raider

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hung back, reminding him irresistibly of a jackal dancing about hoping to dart in after the kill and collect a few scraps. But the big, heavily armored ship bore straight in.

The raider captain did not believe in subtle tactics, it seemed. No attempt to flank, or surround the prey and stampede it into the crossfire of both ships. Evidently these aliens espoused the crude but effective military method of walk - up and - bash - them - hard - on - the - head.

Well, it would certainly work on the merchant-class ships these characters apparently preyed upon.

Jerry wore a spacesuit with the helmet off but conveniently close to his elbow. Drops of perspiration trickled down his face and itched areas he could not reach within the suit. It was the result of exertion, not nerves. In the last few hours he'd done enough hard labor both inside and outside the ship to — under normal conditions — leave him tired for a week. But he was riding the crest of excitement and didn't feel anything.

In fact, his main emotion was a consuming curiosity — He was dying to find out if he had gauged the psychology of these aliens correctly. If he hadn't, it was only a minute or so until he would be dying very literally. But somehow the possibility, though acknowledged, didn't bother him greatly.

Time was up.

The big raider had been steadily decelerating. It now matched velocities and swung its big side around to present maximum firepower. Jerry counted the weapon emplacements facing him. They included lasers, thermo cannon and missile-launching tubes. No verbal demand to surrender was broadcast.

It wasn't needed. The message was clear.

"All right, Jay-jay," he said. "We'll commence our little show as of now."

The ship had been in the radar shadow of one of the open derelicts. It now swung out from behind the wreck, showing itself in detail at the same moment the speakers on board the raider barked:

"Stand away from my prize! This is my catch, and I'll defend it! Back off now — or I fire. I mean it!"

The raider's commander turned to his junior officer. Dark bristles grew down in a scalplock that stopped only when it reached the heavy eyebrow ridge; that, plus the species' vestigial muzzle and snout, did not leave much room for expression. But gestures and an astounded snarl were enough to convey his surprise.

"Where in the black sack of Nefra did that *thing* come from?"

"I don't know," said the dum-

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founded officer. After one long look at the hull detail, he added, "I've never seen anything like it!"

"You know, I don't think *anyone* has ever seen anything like it," snarled the captain. "Look at those spines or warts or whatever those excrescences are all over its hull. Yaa-agh, the thing is bumpier than a *graal*-hog!"

"Perhaps we should just blast it," suggested the junior.

"Good idea!" boomed the captain. "No reason to take chances. It might be poisonous! Har-Har-Har!" He reached for a firing button that would send a nuclear missile on its way.

On board his own ship, Jerry finished counting seconds. "That's enough time, Jay-jay. Give it to them!"

The hairy, four-digited paw froze above the console. "Wha —?" the commander growled in disbelief.

"*Look out!*" his junior officer screamed.

The baffled tiger looked around him and looked behind and even, with one paw up to shade his eyes, scanned the opposite bank of the stream to see if he could find the frog. But there was no sign of the little animal anywhere.

"Now where did that creature go?" said the tiger.

"Here I am!" the frog called cheerfully. "Here in the grass — in front of you!"

"But — but that can't be!" the tiger exclaimed. "How did you get there?"

"Very simply," the frog replied. "I outjumped you."

"But that's impossible! I am a young and strong tiger! I can outjump and outleap anything in the wide, wide world!"

The frog merely belched. "Perhaps," he said. "Anything but *me.*" He belched once more and, with an expression of distaste, the frog spat out a few tiger hairs.

"Excuse me," said the frog. "So much breakfast along with this exercise has upset my stomach. Ah, three tigers *is* a large meal... even for me."

Horrified, the tiger looked at the orange and black hairs and instantly saw what they were. But he did not know the hairs came from the tip of his own tail. For he had been so intent on the contest and determined to outleap the frog that he'd never felt it when the small animal grabbed on.

"Those hairs are real," he said in dismay. "You — you really did eat a tiger!"

"No," said the frog. "I ate *three.* And, as soon as my stomach settles, I might be persuaded to take a small and tender morsel like you for lunch!"

Panic-stricken, the tiger ran.

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"Look out!" The second officer's scream hung in the alien control room.

Frozen in his seat, the commander gawped at the festooned, torpedo-like shape as it swiftly bore down on them. It was incredible that it could move so fast.

Neither officer took note of the mass detection instrument, nor did they see that its needle was obstinately hung on the meter's bottom peg.

The odd-looking missile streaked past just as the commander, coming to life, hit every emergency button on the panel. Sirens hooted, airtight bulkheads whooshed closed. Outside, the stars dimmed in magnitude as the defensive screens went up. Within the massive vessel crew members rushed back and forth, some leaping into battle armor, as others scurried to man assigned posts in the sick bay or clambered to damage control stations.

Fire and radiation were the chief worries on the alien commander's mind as he tracked the now-vanishing rocket. What was its purpose? It had to have one, or else why would that bizarre and incredible-looking ship have launched it?

As if in answer, the bowl of space took light.

Incoming radiation monitors noted merely an increase in lumens on one side of the ship. But the aliens gaped at each other open-mouthed. Colors dripped, ran down and blazed on the control room walls.

Neither officer had seen a good, solid Terran fireworks display before.

...After a time, the explosions dwindled in tempo. A fiery corkscrew errupted, became a blue starshell and then ended with a triple salute.

"That," said a voice issuing from the speaker above their heads, "is just a friendly warning. Now — GIT!"

The wizened face of the story man regarded his audience with great solemnity. None moved. They knew the tale had built and now — and only now — was it about to reach its true climax. His unblinking eyes surveyed the quiet ring of children. He nodded.

"And so," he said quietly, "the tiger ran long and far away. But as he ran, he encountered his friend, the fox. And the fox said, 'Hey, mighty tiger! Slow down! Where are you running to? You look terrified. What is the matter?'

"And the tiger answered, 'Oh, there is a terrible animal behind me, and already he has eaten three other tigers just this morning for breakfast. I fear that, if I stay in this neighborhood much longer, he will grow hungry again and devour me!'

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"Running beside him, the fox said, 'It must be a horrible animal indeed to frighten you, Lord Tiger. Tell me, what is the animal's name?' Panting, the tiger answered, 'He says his name is — King Frog.'

"The fox stopped. 'Frog? Did you say *frog*, most noble tiger?'"

So comically did the story man's face and posture illustrate the baffled fox that the children giggled. As he continued, Jeremy found it necessary to stifle an appreciative whoop of laughter.

"Gasping for breath, the tiger related all that had happened. He finished by saying, 'And I saw him spit out the hairs of three unfortunate tigers with my own eyes. I assure you, friend fox, this King Frog is truly ferocious!'

"But the fox, being himself quite crafty, instantly suspected a trick. 'Perhaps so,' he told the tiger. 'But if this frog is at all like other frogs I am familiar with, then he is small, weak, a light green — and good to eat. Why don't we go see? As it happens, I am very fond of frogs' legs.'"

"Computer, I have two bogies on my screen. Identify please."

"Sure. The bigger blip is the alien raider that lammed out of here earlier. You code-named him Tiger for some reason. The smaller blip is the interceptor that appeared before. No code name given for that one."

Jerry said, "Call this one Fox."

"Right-oh. Fox it is."

"And what are they doing?"

"Coming back here." Watching as the bogies moved inward toward the center of the screen, Jerry didn't need the J-class computer's additional comment. "And they are coming in fast."

The young merchant-ship pilot sighed. He had hoped — when the larger alien vessel turned tail and ran — that the ruse would give them enough time to escape this dwarf star's spider trap. As it was, they were nearly to the zone where it would be safe for them to activate their star drive.

Nearly. But it was not near enough.

With a pang of regret, Jerry wished now he'd taken the extra time needed to bring in the floating net of hologram projectors. With the usual clarity of hindsight, he realized that he might have used them and the entertainment tapes to further delay pursuit.

(The blips were now inside the last few rings closest to center. They appeared to be separating. He supposed one would climb and the other dive. That would be most likely. From azimuth and nadir, the two raiders would command the whole sphere — being able to dodge his firepower, assuming he

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had any, and yet pour in a withering and deadly stream of their own.)

Well, he was left without any gimmicks and very few tricks left to try. He regretted not being able to make use of those tapes. For example, he wondered, how would those sneaking, alien cutthroats react right now if they were suddenly dived on by a squadron of World War II fighter planes? To make it wilder, he might throw in modern battlewagons, or Terran gunboats, or even mounted cowboys, whooping Indians and a spectacular cavalry charge.

Enough time wasted.

"It's not the gimmick, but the principle at work behind it that makes any ruse work." He barely realized he'd spoken it out loud.

"Pardon?" the computer queried.

"Nothing. I was thinking out loud. A principle used by stage magicians everywhere. And con men. Show the audience or prospect what he *thinks* he'll see. Then you can fool him by manipulating his own expectations!"

"I don't get it," said Jay-jay.

"You don't have to. You're just the computer. I'm the pilot. Quick! Does that second alien raider have any sort of name or designation? I mean the small one."

"Of course it does. It's Fox. Remember?"

"No, I mean does it have a *real* name? Some sort of pronounceable appellation — a designation or title by which the big raider addresses it? Come on, Jay-jay. It's important!"

"I don't know," the computer replied. "But if it has one, it'd be in their ship-to-ship chatter. Somewhere."

"Did you record it?"

"Of course I did. Ship's log requires all transmissions be on tape, in case there is ever any need for inquiry as to —"

"All RIGHT!" Jerry bellowed. "Never mind that. Just *find* it!"

"Sure. Why didn't you just say so?"

Seconds passed (as Jerry alternately felt helpless and determinedly gritted his teeth); then the computer coughed once.

"Got it?"

"Not quite sure. This requires statistical analysis —"

"Never mind. I'm not asking for one hundred percent certainty. Make a stab. What do you think it is?"

"I'd say it's eighty-seven point eight percent probable the ship's name, captain's name, or call designation for both is: *Hla-yurk-l.*"

"Oh, great! Check my pronunciation until I get it right. This is critical."

In another minute or so, he'd mastered the difficult phonemes.

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Then, just as they'd done before, they fed the message they intended to broadcast into the translator — but leaving its circuits with enough time to clear so there would be no telltale stumbles or halts.

As they'd worked, Jerry had had to fight down the premonition that in another second he and his ship would be engulfed in a deadly fire or rocket missiles and lasers. He'd quelled the worry since there was nothing else he could do.

Now, though, as he looked up and prepared to broadcast, he saw the reason for the delay. The two raiders had elected to change their tactics.

Instead of swooping in to fire from two widespread points, the raiding ships were coming in slow. And they flew, he saw, almost side by side.

"Jay-jay, I'm confused. What do you think they are doing?"

"Flying close together."

"I know! But why?"

"So they can combine their energy shields. Properly phased, that would give them better than twice their normal defensive screening."

Jerry's low whistle meant he was amazed. "They must think we pack some pretty potent armament!"

"That's the impression we tried to leave them with," was the computer's dry reply.

"True enough." He thought over the possibilities. "We have the psychological advantage! That means this stratagem we cooked up is even more likely to work."

"We hope."

Jerry picked up the mike. His thumb came down on the send button. Hoping that some of it would get through the emotionless translator, he said — in as mean and rapacious a snarl as he could muster:

"Good work, *Hla-yurk-l!* Very cleaverly done, my friend. Oh-Ho-ho! Very good work indeed!

"I see you are inside the big oaf's defenses. Good! NOW CUT HIM DOWN!

"Don't hesitate, *Hla-yurk-l!* The moment we schemed and planned has come! Once we carve this big brute up, there'll be plenty enough loot for all!"

After he finished, there was a moment of shocked — or stunned — silence.

Jerry Ramsey held his breath and waited to see whether their gamble had won or lost.

Then the air snarled with a screeching, spitting crescendo that sounded most like an imbroglio of fighting tomcats. Everything came too fast for the overburdened translator. The equipment gave up. What they received in clear was a sharp, interrogative string of alien syllables. They were followed by a gasp, a snarl and yet another indignant screech.

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Jerry pushed down hard and sideways on the merchantman's steering yoke. At the same moment his ship dropped in a sideslip — it seemed — the big raiding vessel went berserk. Laser beams whipped out randomly in all directions.

Stabilizing his own erratic flight, he brought the nose up in time to see both raiders whirl by in an unbalanced but dynamically linked bola. Neither had thought, apparently, to cut their energy screens. Tiger's bulk was massive, but Fox — despite everything — had all engines grinding away at full. The only safe place, Jerry decided, was one that was well away from there.

It's doubtful if either alien vessel saw him leave.

"There's one thing I don't understand," the computer said much later. They were well on their way; the pile of spilled canned goods had been replaced on the galley shelves; the cargo was again inside crates and braced so it could not shift; and finally they had made the transition to hyperspace and plus-cee flight so they could expect an uninterrupted voyage to Port Joy.

"What I don't understand is this: how could you be so sure they would react with such violent suspicion? To me, their thought processes were totally illogical."

Jerry thought a moment. "Well... it seemed obvious they both shared a predator's psychology. No animal that lives by preying on weaker victims can afford to trust any other predator by much. And each of the two raiders projected his own fears on the other because each knew, within himself, how treacherous he actually was.

"As I say — it just seemed obvious."

Mulling it over, the computer made no reply.

The long low rays of afternoon sunlight glinted through the trees. Dappled shadows played over his face as the storyteller completed his tale.

"So the tiger and the fox walked back to find the frog. But the tiger — who was very nervous — suddenly had an idea. 'Before we get there,' he said to the fox, 'let us tie our tails together to show him we are strong and united. That way, if he attacks, he will have the two of us to deal with.'

"And thus it was that the two animals tied their tails together with long stalks of grass. Then they set out in earnest to find the frog.

"But the little green frog saw them coming and knew what they intended. Seeing their tails tied together gave him an idea. In a loud, frightening voice, he called to the fox: 'Very cleverly done, good fox. That tiger got away from me this morning. But now that you have

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him securely tied, why, drag him here and I will eat him for dinner!'

"Since the tiger lived by being hard and cruel, he was convinced all other creatures did, too. And hearing the frog, he became certain the fox had schemed to betray him. Once again, he turned and ran. But this time he dragged the fox, who was securely tied, along behind him.

"And if they are not dead — for this was all a long time ago — then those two animals are quite likely to be running still."

The story man fell silent. The children, after an appreciative moment that was completely quiet, broke into a chorus of chirrups and whistles. It was proper. On Lin, public approbation was shown not by clapping the hands but rather by long, warbling bird calls.

The merchant Han and his father wandered out after the spate of praise had subsided. Standing, the story man bowed to all and smiled. "Now I must go."

To Jeremy he extended a hand, which the boy took and promptly shook in Earthlike fashion. The man said, "I hope you enjoyed it. Such stories and tales are primarily how we teach on this world. I hope you like this little exposure to our educational system."

Jeremy laughed. "Oh, it was a very good story! Though... I'm not sure I really learned anything," he added after a sidelong look at his father. "Well — I mean to say, I liked the story very much." He laughed again. "There was so much, I hope I can remember it."

The story man smiled. "Oh, fear not. You will remember all that is important about that particular story. Since we teach with fables, what would be the good of teaching something that's easily forgot?"

He bowed once more, this time to the adults, and then he quietly withdrew.

Merchant Han smiled amiably on the Earthmen, father and son. "May I extend the hospitality of my humble house and home to both of you? I should be gratified if you were to join me for an indefinite stay...."

"Thank you very much," said Jeremy's father. "But no. We can't stay. Han, I wish you would convince these people they would be much better off once they joined the Terran Alliance."

Han bowed. "Certainly, my honored captain, it is best that when one undertakes to convince others he first be convinced within himself."

"And you are not." It wasn't a question.

The merchant smiled apologetically. "We are not fighters. We are not even very good workers. We like to sit around and discuss things too

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much. Oh, we fight sometimes. It is like work — a thing done when we have to.

"Our forebearers who settled Lin and terraformed it were quite different. But we — have changed. Perhaps it is a reaction against those grim, pioneering ghosts in our past.

"Who can say? I do know one thing — my honored friend, please believe me when I tell you that the whole planet of Lin together with all its inhabitants would be of no use at all to your Terran empire."

Jeremy's father was angry enough to snap, "It's not an empire! It's an alliance, dammit. Made up of free and independent worlds that share the burden of a common defense. And it might save your backward hides some day!"

Han smiled imperturbably. "It might. In which case, we should all be humbly grateful. In the interim, if you choose, now or any time later, my tea table and sleeping pallet are yours." Completing the ritual of hospitality, the merchant bowed twice and withdrew.

On board their own ship, Jeremy could tell his father was very annoyed over something. But the problem didn't affect him, nor was he concerned for the gentle people of Lin. After all, they had King Frog to protect them.

In the night he dreamed of talking animals.

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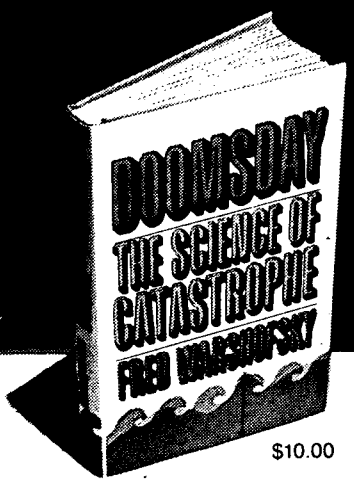

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Dying of the Light is George R.R. Martin's first novel. It has a number of good things in it, some of them spectacularly good. But it cries out for another draft, which obviously it won't get, and so we have to take it as a promise of what will happen when Martin does another long story.

That will be worth waiting for, unless Martin now takes seriously the quality of criticism reflected by the advance statements of Roger Zelazny, Ben Bova and A.E. van Vogt, who are quoted on the back of the jacket. No doubt others will spend a lot of time telling him how great it is. Martin is an impressive writer, and one with an uncommon breadth of imagination to go with his armamentarium of storytelling skills. But he tried for a *tour de force* that simply will not work over 340 pages unless everything is done exactly right, and he didn't do it exactly right. He is to be commended for his ambition and his conception, as well as for any number of the details he has brought to them, yet anyone who calls this a good novel is referring to what ought to have been, might have been, but isn't.

Given all that, this is still a better piece of work than most of the hackneyed, limited pieces of yardgoods that come milling off the publishers' loading docks with such stultifying invariability every month. There are dozens of writers in SF who, given the basic situation in *Dying of the Light*, would have made it more all-of-a-piece, reduced it to manageable dimensions, told it on a more pedestrian level, and produced just another damned Doubleday novel

ALGIS BUDRYS

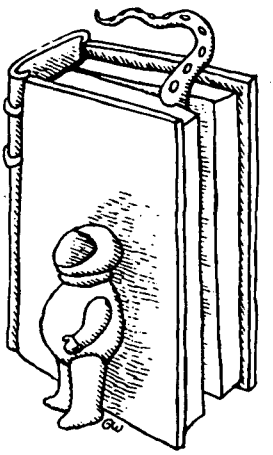
Books

Dying of the Light, George R.R. Martin. Simon & Schuster, $9.95

The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, 22nd Series. Edward Ferman, Ed. Doubleday, $7.95

The Devil in a Forest, Gene Wolfe. Ace Books, $1.50

Frank Kelly Freas: The Art of Science Fiction, Frank Kelly Freas, Ed. Introduction by Isaac Asimov. $7.95 (8½x11") paper), from The Donning Company, Publishers, Inc., 253 W. Bute Street, Norfolk, VA 23510



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for the Sci-Fi section of the local public library. So let us dwell for a while on what, instead, Martin did with it.

The story is set in the far human future — so far that there has been time for the interstellar empire of humankind to collapse, for an Interregnum in which many human-colonized worlds went their own way for millennia, and for the emergence of profound societal differences between them. Faithful readers of Martin's work will recognize the general background against which he has set so many excellent stories.

The specific setting here is the planet Worlorn — a sunless rogue world which, after aeons of journeying frozen through the galaxy, is about to move on past the Rim and out into the intergalactic deeps, set in motion by God knows what catastrophe and destined for nowhere. But just before it departs reachable space, it passes briefly by the Wheel, a spectacular system of multiple suns in Trojan orbit around a vast central red star. For a little while, it will be warmed by the rugose glare of Fat Satan and its satellites. In an outburst of pride, the resurgent spacefaring cultures of Humanity transform the awakened Worlorn into a festival world, transporting to it samples of their complete ecologies, and building typical cities of their own, so that the entire planet is a vast and varied exposition of fourteen distinct cultures.

Those who know Martin will not be surprised that he chooses to tell his story at the time when, passing beyond the habitable zone around the Wheel, Worlorn is returning to eternal cold and darkness. The Festival is ended. The only numans still on Worlorn are a few stragglers, some hunters, and a very few researchers who are studying the decay and interaction of the various transplanted ecologies. Martin, who has a positive tropism for twilight, has created for himself the quintessential Martin environment.

In this story, he has additionally done something else. To counterpoise with the physical conditions, he has created Dirk t'Larien, whose love with Gwen Delvano once flourished and sang, but who was abandoned by her some years ago. In response to her enigmatic summons, he now arrives on Worlorn, where she is an ecologist and living with Jaan Vikary and his *teyn* — his comrade-in-arms; his alter ego — Garse Janacek. He thinks perhaps she regrets leaving him for Vikary, who is a member of the ferocious High Kavalaar culture and who calls himself a wolfman. He hopes a rekindled love has called him from his dilettante life among the soft worlds, and that he can take her back with him.

The world of Worlorn, and the circumstances in time, are thus clearly part of a symbolic structure in which t'Larien's state of mind and the condition of the planet are intended to mirror each other. There is no doubt that Martin intends the story to be read for symbolism, since he makes underscored use of repeated symbology, archetypified by t'Larien's recurring exposure to the image of an oncoming silent boatman. There are also pure atmospherics — a city so constructed that the wind in its towers constantly plays the despairing musical compositions of a culture whose highest artistic

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attainment was the quintessence of suicidal depression; a wolfman city whose very stones glow fiery red in the dark; choker trees which are rapidly overgrowing all the other forests; leprous mosses which envelope the grasses before themselves liquefying into slime under the thickening shadows.

Martin knows exactly what he is doing here, and why. There are times when he does not quite pull it off; the singing city is described, its effect on t'Larien and Gwen is described, and in one way or another the reader of those passages is frequently reminded of what the city sings, but I do not believe that the reader ever *hears* a single wail. Somewhere, Martin's prose technique has fallen a little short of accomplishing that effect. Nevertheless, this is not a crucial flaw, and there is no general difficulty in the reader's being taken up by the mood of the story as a whole.

So far, so good. There are also some narrative passages, in the second quarter of the book, which are markedly less well-written than the rest and which are actually about the worst writing, as writing, I have ever seen from Martin. The descriptions become stilted, the dialogue is totally banal; character actions become purposeless. It's almost as if that portion of the manuscript were either on its first draft or, perhaps likelier, its twentieth. That passes, and meanwhile it has at least done its work, but it is an extensive hint that Martin at times was not in perfect control.

Where this story comes a cropper is in that Martin has chosen to tell the story of Gwen and Jaan from t'Larien's viewpoint and that — this is the crucial thing — although he is in very good control of Gwen, Jaan, Garse, and various subsidiary characters, and in acceptable control of the character of the meddling villain who actually sent Dirk the unwarranted summons, he never truly defines t'Larien. The man is simply not characterized. He is not dilettante enough when we first see him, not fool enough later, not brave enough nor cowardly enough, not smart enough nor dumb, neither lover to Gwen nor brother nor companion in distress.

Now, it is possible to see what Martin was trying to do. The powerful story of Gwen and Jaan attempting to forge a meaningful relationship across cultural rigidities, and their eventual success at enormous cost, *is* best told from a third viewpoint. In no other way can their disparate culture biases be so clearly shown, and Martin does that with great effectiveness, reaching a level of intensity worthy of a classical epic. This is no ordinary creative talent we can see at work there.

But the talent needs another attempt at t'Larien, a fact which is underscored aptly enough when the villain, without proper preamble and off stage to boot, commits suicide. It is too easy to see that Martin simply brushed him out of the cast of characters when his job was done. The man has set all this in motion, and kept it in motion throughout the bulk of the story; now there's no further use for him, and Gwen is simply reported to have come in from his room and stated that he'd hung himself. No one even goes into the room to look.

By strong implication, then, the task of doing so well with Gwen, Jaan, their relationship to Garse, and their

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interactions with other High Kavalaars, has exhausted Martin's capacity for concentrated attentiveness to the other principal characters. t'Larien walks through his role, neither fish nor fowl, dashing about aimlessly not with the characteristically rationalized actions of the misguided but, too often, simply because the author needs him to be at a certain place at a certain time, performing some action which serves no organic purpose. So tangled-up does this skein become that, toward the end when it's time to sum up who of the characters is where and in what condition — when it's vitally important to know how many of the subsidiary villains are still capable of intercepting t'Larien and the fleeing lovers who must get off Worlorn and out to someplace where they can maintain their own newly forged culture — this reader was forced to choose between going back over the appropriate passages while cross-indexing a set of notes, or of saying to hell with it. I did what any reader is entitled to do when the author has not done that for him, and I simply went on toward the ending. That ending, which might be poignant, dramatic, and a perfect period to the story, given that extra draft, is empty of all effect because t'Larien is and has been essentially empty.

He did not have to be. There is no quarrel on my part with Martin's choice of a viewpoint character who is actually just a subsidiary figure in the story. To say the least, there is not; it's gratifying to see someone attempting a departure from the often limited techniques common to narrative in SF. But the thing is that t'Larien is not sufficiently colorless to be a neutral vehicle for the reader's comprehension, but not sufficiently purposeful to be a figure of empathy. Those are, as far as I know, the only two routes to clear reader understanding of a story, and t'Larien hippety-hops between them, constantly falling behind the pace of story development. He is not even on stage for many crucial developments in the Gwen-Jaan relationship, and he, and we, have to be told about them. The telling is often as perfunctory as Gwen's report on the meddler's death and thus, contrasted to the loving pictorial detail devoted to many less important incidents, far less verisimilitudinous.

I have taken all this time to repeat to you what I began with — this book needs another draft, and then it will emerge as a major creative accomplishment by a notable talent. But I also want to tell you that like Zelazny, Bova and van Vogt, other critics and possibly some award committees will look beyond what the reader gets and react to what might have been. For your own good, reader, take it with a grain of salt. Take it with a grain of salt, George.

The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, 22nd Series, is now out, from Doubleday. Even a broken clock is right twice a day.

The selection here ranges from 1973 upwards, presenting an excellent cross-section of the sort of thing produced by this magazine, which turns out to have published some of the best SF of this period. There are such major stories as Tom Reamy's "San Diego Lightfoot Sue," James Tiptree, Jr.'s "The Wo-

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men Men Don't See," and John Varley's "In the Bowl." There is Joanna Russ's "My Boat." All four of these are stories that are discussed and cited whenever SF wants to talk about its best of recent days. In a more traditional vein, but very, very good, are Robert Bloch's "A Case of The Stubborns," Manly Wade Wellman's "The Ghastly Priest Doth Reign," and Reginald Bretnor's "Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and All." There are others, and not a clinker in the lot. Liz Hufford's "This Offer Expires," for instance, is not only good, and memorable in the same way that John Collier stories are memorable, but illustrates this magazine's ability to showcase first-rate writing by people who do not write very often.

In editing this volume, Ed Ferman has also done something not done in previous members of the series. #22 contains, in addition to the fiction, selections from various F&SF Competitions, as well as representative columns from Isaac Asimov, Baird Searles, and myself. The result is that what we have here strikes me like a very good issue of this magazine, even though I have to include my own work in that blanket appraisal.*

I wish I didn't sound so much like a shill. But the fact is that for reasons totally unrelated to my sporadic appearances here, F&SF has gradually become my favorite SF magazine, despite occasional fits of rage at the typesetting. I think the contents of this volume offer sufficient reason for my having attained to that opinion. Go buy it — I won't be ashamed to have sent you.

Ace has brought out a reprint of Gene Wolfe's *The Devil in a Forest,* a story that I read in one sitting. It may or may not be a fantasy; there is a passing reference to something that may have been a supernatural incident in objective fact, rather than simply something that haunted the troubled sleep of Mark, the weaver's apprentice. Ace calls it a fantasy, which may be a case of pinning the SF label on a "mundane" work in order to obtain a greater sale. (How things have changed!)

In any event, this tale of a catastrophic few days in a Medieval English hamlet is told so beautifully, and gathers power at such a nicely controlled pace, that there is no getting out of it once you get into it.

Wolfe is just amazing with milieu. In *The Best from F&SF* volume, you will find a Frederik Pohl-C.M. Kornbluth short story called "Mute Inglorious Tam," which in its brief compass tells you more about the life of a Saxon peasant than you ever learned by watching Robin Hood on the TV. But Wolfe here sustains a similar atmosphere over 216 pages, making real people out of personalities formed in no world of ours, clothing and housing them, causing them to move and speak with absolute fidelity to verisimilitude. In addition, every board has its creak, every footpath its heelmarks, every tree its leaves. The guy is just an unbelievably effective writer, and a hell of a re-

**Tell you the truth, I wish I'd had the wit to proofread the thing, as well as to correct such errors as referring to Jerome Bixby's "It's a* Good *Life" as "It's a* Good *Day." And Ray Bradbury did sell one story to ASF, as Barry Malzberg reminds me.*

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searcher to boot. If you had a dozen Michael Crichtons each working on *Eaters of The Dead*, you'd still be leagues away from what Wolfe has done, and never a seam nor a wrinkle to remind you of how diligently he has labored to make the reading effortless.

Forgive me. I was gushing. Let me do it some more. In addition to all that, Wolfe holds your interest throughout, using the viewpoint of young, unsophisticated Mark to tell you what appears to be a simple tale of a time when outlawry and ordinary life were not at all distinct from each other. Only toward the end does it develop that what he has been telling you all along was an inexorable buildup to events of such power, based on such profound superstition, and just possibly on one of the most central of all supernatural events, that you do, indeed, achieve that rare moment when mere words on paper can make your scalp prickle.

I don't know how he does it. Gene Wolfe is not one of those names you come up with when listing the top twenty SF practitioners, unless you happen to be me. But that bald, burly, middleaged *paterfamilias* living out there in Barrington Hills, Illinois and working five days a week on a plant engineering trade magazine has got some muse tucked away, there. Behind those thick eyeglasses and the high, quick speaking voice something dreams and sings.

The mail has brought word that Tom Reamy is dead of a heart attack at the age of 42. His friends and acquaintances mourn him. He brought to SF an uncommon wit, a point of view whose sophistication was such that it had gained the quality of innocence, and a promise which many of us were looking forward to seeing fulfilled. His first novel was in progress. Damn.

For $7.95, you can buy dazzlement. Donning, a publisher new to SF, with further SF ambitions, has brought out *Frank Kelly Freas: The Art of Science Fiction*, a large-format 120-page book crammed with the work of one of the world's foremost SF artists. The $7.95 is for the high-quality paperback. There is also a boxed collector's edition, about which you can inquire of the publisher, and a library edition (ISBN 0-915442-38-8). The bookstore order number for the paperback is ISBN 0-915442-37-X, if you don't want to write to Donning direct.

I know of no other SF art book as good. In part, this is because Freas's work is so beautiful on every necessary level and then on some additional ones. Very well reproduced on high-grade paper by Japanese engravers, the 8½ x 11" full-page color plates alone are worth the price, not only for the breathtaking impact of color and design but also for the meticulous workmanship brought to his art by a man who has devoted a lifetime to exploratory technique and experimental materials. All of that he did in the full knowledge that the copper-cutters of Chicopee Falls and the lithographers of Wet Prairie, ND, would do their best to dull it down in the process of doing work farmed out by *Planet Stories* and *Astounding*.

But there is more. In addition to a profusion of color and black-and-white spot illustrations placed lovingly within

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the volume, which Freas himself designed, there are Freas's notes on the work, comments on art and on the rather different thing that is illustration, casual pointers on technique, and many an anecdote on the SF illustrator's life in general and Freas's special relationship with John Campbell in particular.

The thing about Freas is that he is, above all, an illustrator. Many an artist in this field can draw a pretty design and ornament it to the point where other artists can only wonder at how he did it. But an illustrator does a piece of work that pulls your eye into the page and sends you already prepared into the story. And that's something else; that's intelligence, self-discipline, and conscience.

When I was a lad in the wordsmith trade, Kelly and I did a lot of things together. Hanging up on one of my walls right now is the original *Astounding* cover for "The End of Summer," which was my first ASF cover — in fact, my first magazine cover — and which Kelly did from my manuscript. (I still owe him for it.) Hanging up on another wall is a Ctein print of the Lancer Books cover for *Who?*, which I wrote, essentially, in the moment I turned a corner in Leo Margulies's office at *Fantastic Universe* and found myself confronted for the first time by a portrait of the man who would become Lucas Martino, who eventually turned up in a movie with Elliot Gould and Trevor Howard, and who has been otherwise adding his mite to my coffers for 24 years, now. Each time somebody reprints that book — there are a dozen foreign editions in print, as well as a U.S. one from Ballantine whose cover rips off Kelly's original — I am back in that first moment, after which I was never the same. Kelly tells the story differently, in this book; he has confused it with the time I wandered into his studio and saw him doing the rough sketches for "The Executioner,"* but his anecdote is true to truth, if not to fact.

I cannot tell you how many times Kelly and I worked together, with one or the other of us originating the collaboration. But I can tell you I each time did my god-damnedest, because I knew he would do his. And I am by any measure only a minor figure among the many, many others whose creativity and professionalism benefitted from interplay with Kelly's. That is, of course, in addition to the effect transmitted to the reader of a Freas-illustrated story. For more observations on this phenomenon, see the introduction by Isaac Asimov, who very likely says it more coherently.

There is a lot to bringing the reader entertainment, to finding and clarifying the essential thing that wants to be transmitted, to giving it memorability. And in the days when Kelly first hove on the scene, freshly in collaboration with his lifetime partner, the wonderful Polly Freas, none of us were being paid anything like what it cost. People like Kelly, working into the second dawn on a black-and-white interior for $25,

(*to page 117*)

**There became two "Executioners." One, by Frank Riley, appeared in* IF *with Kelly's finished cover. Mine, without a cover, ran simultaneously in ASF. Kelly did the interior illustrations for both. It was a peculiar episode.*

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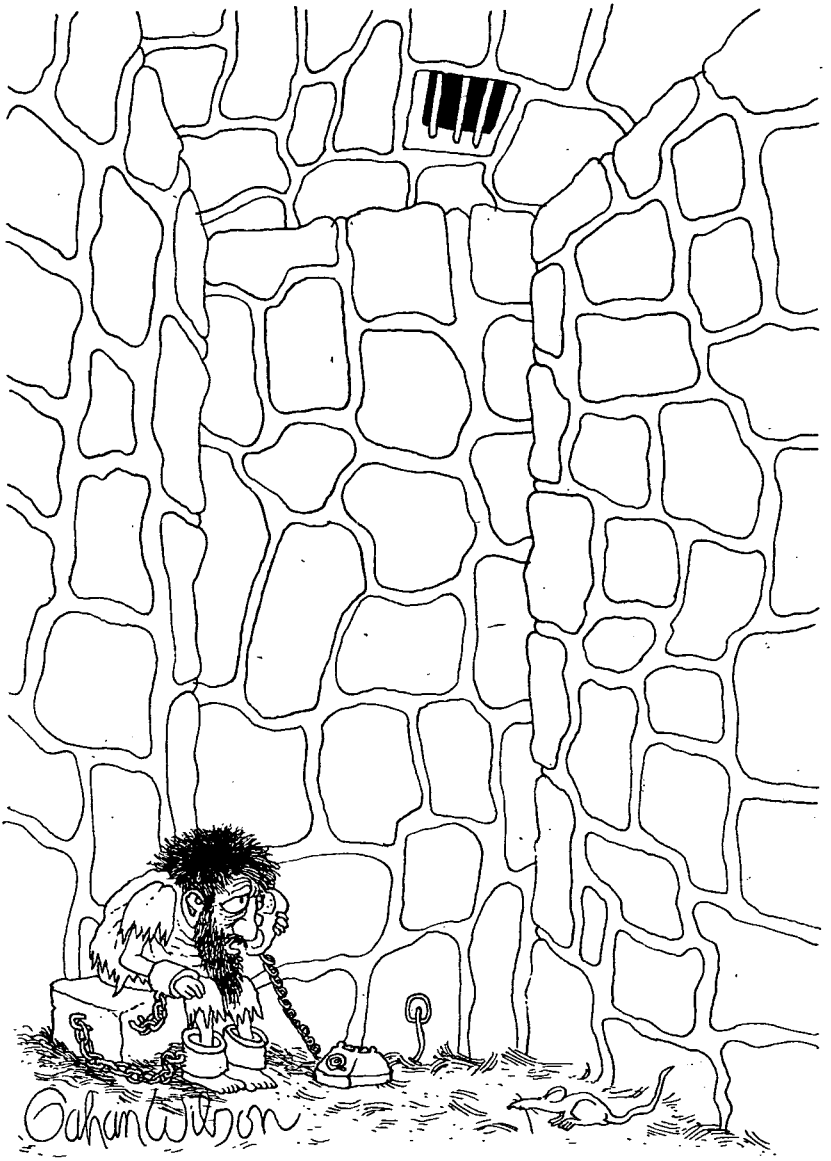

"I'm afraid you have the wrong number."

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Barry Malzberg returns with the first of three sketches about, of all things, writers' heaven, and we think he has it just about right. As Big Ernie says: "We have all we need to drink and the companionship of those who understand us and now and then the possibility of tenderness . . ."

Big Ernie, The Royal Russian and The Big Trapdoor

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

So the time comes when I am sitting in writer's heaven, which bears a striking resemblance to the set of the famous and respected Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh,* perusing as is my wont a copy of one of the recent magazines which is imported into these environs for our reading pleasure if desired, when I come uptwixt a story by a writer whose name I will not relate which contains many character names, scenes and stylistic references exactly identical to those of my own. It is not the first time that this has happened — it is surprising how many magazines are passed around writer's heaven and how many of them still open their pages to my imitators — but there is something about this particular manifestation which angers me. Perhaps it has to do with my relative state of inebriation so early in the day in writer's heaven, and then again it may be the matter of straws and camels' backs which is a very preponderant cliche, even to this day. I set the magazine upon the counter with a ringing shout and say, "This is not right. This is absolutely not right. There should be a statute of limitations upon the plagiarizing of the styles of famous dead writers, after which it is no longer permissible or the perpetrator must pay a severe penalty. I do not think it is fair, and in the bargain there is absolutely no recourse except in the matter of ghosts or appeals to conscience, neither of which are recognized in the technologized last quarter of the twentieth century. It is not right," I continue, "and I am deeply aggravated, but then and upon the other hand what can be done?"

"Nothing can be done," says Big Ernie sitting next to me in his midday stupor. "It is merely the way it is. Conditions suit. The dead can no longer address the living.

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The living cannot address the living. The living cannot address the dead." He looks at the empty shot glass in front of him. "Idaho was never like this," he says.

Ernie, or Big Ernie as we call him, has had a notable career of course and even at this point has not fallen into total disrepute, but there is no question but that he is a bit of a bore, and even in writer's heaven, which he has occupied for half as many years as myself approximately, even by our standards, he is something of a drunk. "Something will have to be done," I say, passing the magazine across to him, "but you need not concern yourself if perhaps you believe that imitation is a form of flattery, which incidentally I do not." I look at Jimmy the Horse, who is on the morning shift in the heaven, and say, "You can pour Big Ernie another round of what he is having and you can also give me a gin straight up with no lemon. Gin is the homewrecker, as all of us know, but there is no home to wreck, and I am extremely discontent even at this early hour and need to anneal the pain."

Jimmy the Horse, a small guy who is on consignment from the musician's quarter, shrugs and goes about his business of procuring the request, deigning no reply. He is a phlegmatic man from years of listening to Fritz and Pablo and Gregor complain about management and has learned to ignore writer's talk, which is to his advantage and why he is now our temporary permanent bartender. Our previous temporary bartender, Fast Hands Willie Smith, did not have this laudable ability, and after some months of taking us seriously began to show signs of latent childhood schizophrenia and alcoholism necessitating a swift trade, even-up, to musician's heaven where it is rumored he and Scott Joplin are being dried out together. "I have the rye for Big Ernie," Jimmy the Horse says, displaying it, "and I have the homewrecker for you, and I have nothing else at all. That is a very interesting cover on that magazine you are reading. One would take it to be a picture of machinery although I know that neither you nor Big Ernie are at all mechanically oriented." This is Jimmy the H's idea of a joke and it is his one obligatory humorous comment of the morning. He gives us our drinks and goes away to his secret place behind the bar where as if from a great distance I can hear him thinly humming passages from the greatly beloved if somewhat overfamiliar Pastoral Symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven.

"It is not right," I say, not to Ernie but to the walls this time. "Something has to be done about this; our work should not be in-

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terred with our bones but our voices should be." I should point out at this time that Big Ernie and I are the only occupants of writer's heaven at this particular time of the day. Later on they will all be there, of course, Oxford Billie and Baby Eugene and the two Johns only a sample of the great number which come in to sing and reminisce and drink heavily until the dawn, but at this early time only the really serious drinkers, of which I am able to number Big Ernie and myself, tend to be in. Here, in writer's heaven as in all of the other aspects of the City of God, an attempt has been made to reconstruct our rounds as according to our ideals, and writers, simple creatures all despite their complaints and assumed oddities, prefer days with a clearly defined morning, afternoon and night, of which only the most dedicated prefer to drink in the mornings. This explains the rather sketchy nature then of the characterization and ambience of the bar, but on the other hand and as I would be the first to admit I was never too strong on heavily populated scenes or detailed stage management, and therefore it is for the very best that at the time of my explosion of anger only Big Ernie, Jimmy the Horse and I are present in the environs. "I can think of something," I add after a long sullen pause. "I can petition the committee. I can take the matter to the committee, who would certainly approve of visitations, omens and threats. They will understand the circumstances, and if they do not they might be able to arrange for a few premature admissions to purgatory."

"I tell you," Big Ernie says, "it is hopeless. You have no rights, in life or in death. Besides, it is not so bad here. We have all we need to drink and the companionship of those who understand us and now and then the possibility of tenderness. Our work is done, our good is gone. We have the rewards of finality. Dark, dark finality." He belches. "It is all nada, I must tell you," he adds.

"It is not," I say. "It comes to more than that. My style is important to me; it is all that I have, really, since the cancer fund after the death of my esteemed friend the newspaper columnist has not been doing so good. Also no one reads my work any more, and therefore those who read the work of the plagiarists must conclude that it is a fresh and compelling style, entirely new. It is not a great style but it is not so bad," I say, draining the gin. "Considering that I was of inordinate sensitivity and wrote a lot of drip-dry sentimental stuff with great heart and handkerchief before I finally evolved a different argot, it is quite good. I admit that it cancels feeling to a certain de-

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gree, but then again it is racy, and its present-tense mode of narration and quick switches of gear as well as generous incorporations of the vernacular imparts a feeling of much energy."

"But it is dated," Big Ernie says. "It is of a world which no longer is."

I put down the gin in a bound and motion to Jimmy the Horse, who is called the Horse for no reason I can ascertain, to refill. "It is not dated," I say, "it is an artifact, a perfect recollection of a time eternal, frozen in the forever."

"That is all bullshit," Big Ernie says and shows the galloping Jimmy the Horse his own empty shot glass. "It is total *merde*. It is of a fantasy. It never existed."

"There is no reason to say that," I say hotly, slamming the bar as the patient Horse conveys bottles to more easily do his wondrous work. "To insult the style is to insult the man. Besides," I add cunningly, "you are no one to talk about the matter of dating. Your work is so dated it has ossified. No one believes in that code hero crap any more."

Big Ernie turns upon me menacingly although the light does not nevertheless fail to glitter off his prominent if healed exit wounds. "How dare you say that," he says. "My style is pure and true. It is the truth. It is pure and good and true whereas yours is a lie."

Jimmy the Horse flicks his towel over the bar and says pacifying things. "If you don't stop it I will throw you out," he adds.

"You will not throw us out," I say. "This is writer's heaven, and we can carry ourselves as we see fit." To Big Ernie I say, "Your style is false to the bottom. It is utterly contrived and attitudinal in nature." Why I am doing this I do not know since I am not a literary critic by any standard and despise these people, who have no heaven at all of their own. It must have to do with my own mounting sense of frustration. "Your style is merde," I say. "He who steals your style steals merde."

Big Ernie looks at me menacingly. His hands tremble as he brings the rye to his teeth and then all the way down. "Let's take it outside," he says menacingly referring to that small patch of exterior blue which lies between us and the barracks on one side, the brothel on the other. "I will deal with you in the only way that it is proper."

"That is fine with me," I say. It is a terrible thing to turn on one's own, but then who else is there to turn on? "I will be happy to do so, false fisherman."

"Columnist," Big Ernie says.

"Code coward," I say furiously, "and you did lots of journalistic material yourself."

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"*No cojones,*" says Big Ernie.

"Outside," says Jimmy the Horse and we begin to move toward the doors; I think reluctantly that Big Ernie is going to be knocked unconscious yet again — this is all part of his heaven — but just as we approach the swinging doors there is a little puff of air and whisk, and through the swinging doors comes a dapper man in European costume and high-domed forehead looking something like a breeder-owner on only slightly hard times or then again like a headwaiter in a medium-priced joint that is pushing hard for column mentions. He looks at us disdainfully and goes to the bar, struggling with his gloves. "I will have an aperitif," he says to Jimmy the Horse in a voice which is only slightly haughty. "Perhaps I may study your wine list."

Jimmy the Horse ducks toward me, his eyes filled with awe. "I did not think he would be in so soon," he says. "He must have breezed through the checkpoints. Do you know who this is?"

Big Ernie tugs me by the shoulder. "Let us go outside," he says.

"You will not want to go outside when I tell you who this is," Jimmy the Horse says, and at the quaver in his voice we lean forward, the two of us, respectfully. "That is the Russian," he says. "The Royal Russian. The emigre."

"Your wine list, please," the Royal Russian says, seemingly oblivious to our conference, "and very soon please, steward."

Big Ernie's hand falls from me and he steps away. "I know him," he says. "I have heard of him."

Some note in his voice, some

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tiny note which I have never heard before, makes me glimpse the fact that I will not have to knock Big Ernie off his pins today. Although I do not know who the Royal Russian is, I can see the aura of respect which he has generated within the spaces of this bar, which is not otherwise characterized by its hospitality toward Salvation Army ladies or the revivalist mumblings of the fundamental types. "Very well," I say, returning to the bar and picking up my jigger of homewrecker as Jimmy the Horse engages the Royal Russian in vigorous conversation from which the word *Chablis* finally emerges like a helium balloon. I drink the homewrecker. The Royal Russian looks at me with disdain. Big Ernie to his left begins to pray loudly as Jimmy the Horse rattles bottles. Finally I decide to break, as it were, the ice.

"What do we do?" I say respectfully to the attentive Russian, "in the face of living writers stealing our very styles as their own and granting us no return?"

The Russian's mask of interest breaks and it is all contempt. "We are all living," he says. "We are all dead. We all have one style and we all must return. A dance, a mask, a masque, a masquerade, a mockery, a trap, a trapdoor." He reaches out his hand for the wine. "Mockery," he says and drinks it easily.

Big Ernie sobs. I have a feeling that things will change even in the unchanging (they had promised us) writer's heaven. And it had seemed *so* eternal!

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Andrew Weiner was born in London, got a BA in social psychology, worked in advertising, "which I didn't like; since then have been supporting myself as a freelance writer, mostly rock writing for some English magazines, also some copywriting, some psychology writing." Mr. Weiner, who had a story in Harlan Ellison's Again, Dangerous Visions, *now lives with his wife in Montreal.*

The Deed

by ANDREW WEINER

Stern's Journal:

Day One

It begins. And well enough, at least so far. We are on our way now, well on our way, nearly all the way out of the system on Webb's last report, already a very long way from home. And tomorrow, very early tomorrow, we will exceed the speed of light and enter into this *null space* stuff I have heard so much about and get down to the real business of interstellar flight.

This has been an exciting day, tremendously so, at least for me, from my point of view. The attention of the world, that's no negligible thing, not so very easy to shrug off. And the take-off itself, while of course absolutely according to plan, was really a very thrilling sort of experience, full of terror and elation and awe and exaltation, all kinds of powerful and ambivalent emotions. I felt them, at least. It was, I believe, a moment to compare with almost any other in my lifetime, a genuine peak experience, just thinking about the send-off and the take-off and the voyage ahead of us, all the unknown pleasures and dangers we may have to face.

To be first. Or at least, among the first, one of the first seven humans to travel towards another star. And I myself the very first shrink in space, the first to embark on such an astonishing journey. I will be remembered, surely, alongside Freud, Pavlov, Skinner. Of this I am determined.

I see it clearly already. The fame which will come my way on our return. My address to an awed APA. The vidshow spots. The lecture tours. The million dollar book deals.

What shall I call it, my best-selling account of this little trip? I

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have been thinking for a while in terms of something like *Man's Search*, something at once simple and dignified. But on reflection I fear that this is more than a little pompous, and in any case somewhat lacking in popular-type appeal. I believe that I shall go for something rather snappier, and at the same time altogether more modest, something like *Seven To Centauri*. I think that might very well fit the bill.

But all of that is far off, very far off, and it may not pay to think too much about that sort of thing, to count my chickens before they are hatched, as they say in folk wisdom, and not without good reason. Not only that, it tends to dredge up from within me all kinds of barely repressed doubts and fears about my own exact motives in opting to make this trip.

Day Two

We have entered null space. We are by no means the first humans to experience this transition; there have been exhaustive tests prior to our flight. But no one before has set out to stay so long within it, nor to travel so far.

Null space, it has been very carefully explained to me, is what matter external to the ship becomes beyond the speed of light. Or perhaps, what it *seems* to become. It seems, at any rate, to become utterly without existence. We are traveling through absolute nothingness. I do not truly comprehend the reasons behind all this, but I take it on trust. Just as I take it on trust that no possible harm can come to us. After all, our captain, Webb, has already been here, within this stuff, and returned entirely whole.

It was, in any case, something of an anticlimax, passing into null space. I felt very little, perhaps a momentary disorientation, seeing the stars winking out, just like that. And afterwards, nothing at all. It was merely dull, looking out of the observation windows, it reminded me most of all of some kind of subway wall, the wall of a subway as seen from a moving carriage, just an endless dull and dark sort of blankness.

At any rate, we are definitely on our way now, on our way to another star, perhaps another planet, almost assuredly so in the view of Mission Control, and there is no turning back now, no question of that. And suddenly it seems very hard to get excited about it any more. It's all too far in the future, one hundred and five days in the future to be precise, and to tell the truth, to be absolutely honest about this, I have to admit that I'm bored already, really very bored, the boredom is already starting to get to me.

* * *

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Day Three

I must say this. It is dull stuff, this spaceflight, much duller than I had been led to expect, positively humdrum. The simulations scarcely prepared me to face this tedium. Always, then, there was the thrill of anticipation. But that seems to have gone now, mysteriously gone, all gone away. I seem to be very far past that point. I feel quite empty now, I feel suspended somehow in time, a hanging man. Three days out and the boredom is really weighing down on me.

The fact is, there is nothing for me to do here, nothing at all, not for the moment and perhaps not for the duration. Perhaps Webb is right and there will be absolutely nothing for me to do all along, my presence here will prove completely unnecessary. I am not yet prepared to face that eventuality.

Day Six

Preliminary observations of the crew. This is tedious stuff, but I must get down to it sooner or later. Either I will keep up this journal or I will tear it up now. But really I feel the most extreme kind of ennui right now. I am having the greatest difficulty in focusing my thoughts, let alone trying to get them down on paper.

The crew, then. I have been observing them closely, in accordance with my duties, and really there is very little to report. Things are very calm at the moment, entirely too calm for my liking. They should be showing some kind of reaction.

"How does it feel?" I asked our anthropologist, Kruger, as he stood beside me staring out the observation window into null space. He looked at me blankly. "What?" he asked.

I made the same approach to our nutrition officer, Marsha Paine. She shrugged. "All right," she said "It's all right."

The captain reacted with hostility. "What do you mean?" he asked, very sharply. "What are you getting at?"

The crew, I believe, are concealing their thoughts and feelings on all possibly controversial topics from me, if not also from themselves. And still I have eyes and ears. They will not, finally, evade me.

Kruger, in particular, I will have to watch closely. His profiles disturb me. There are strong indications of depressive tendencies in his projective tests, and his behavior so far shows a quite apparent lack of affect, a pervasive indifference to everyone and everything.

Had it been up to me, Kruger would not have made this trip. He is a great man, for sure, almost single-handedly responsible for the

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reconstruction of the ancient Martian culture. But that was a long time ago, all his triumphs are in the past, and it is said that he has not been the same since the death of his wife. He is at any rate too old for this kind of business, and Control were wrong to put him at risk. Their motives, I think, were purely political. They used Kruger's prestige to help get this mission off the ground, to mobilize public interest and loosen the government's purse strings.

There will be trouble with Kruger, I am fairly sure about that. But for the moment all seems to go smoothly. The crew go about their work, if they have any work. McVay watches his engines and Paine looks after her food tanks and Bachman runs tests in her surgery. Green and Webb do their piloting, whatever that may involve. Kruger does whatever it is that he does all day. And I sit here playing tapes and scanning books and screening movies and going slowly crazy waiting for something to happen.

We eat, sleep, exercise, play games, make tentative maneuvers towards sexual alignments. And sooner or later there will be trouble, trouble it will fall upon me to deal with to the best of my ability. But for the moment it's all very quiet, very quiet indeed.

* * *

Day Eight

In all honesty, I can avoid this subject no longer. If this record is to be of any value, then I can exclude nothing, no matter how personally distasteful. It is necessary for me to record my own, steadily increasing, feeling of agitation.

I am agitated by the now apparent hostility of the crew. It is all too clear how little affection any of them have for me. I must blame Webb for this. He set the lead, back in the earliest briefing session. "Why?" he asked. "Why do we need *him*?"

A reasonable question, in a way, and it surely deserved a better answer than Control seemed able to offer. To deal with possible questions of alien psychology, they said. Also as a backup to the regular medical officer. And, yes, though with great reluctance, they did have to admit that my presence was necessary as a guarantee against the most extreme eventualities. Not that they were expecting anything of that nature, not in the least, but they had to insure themselves against all the possible alternatives it lay within their power to predict and avert.

There was no talk of madness, none at all. But it was understood. Webb understood, as the other members of the crew understood, that I am here to watch them, to

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constantly monitor their behavior, to look for the first signs of fracture and move in very fast and seal them back together again and keep this whole show operative.

I have tried very hard to play down this aspect of my role. I have made the most vigorous efforts to mingle, to gain their affection and confidence. But since the beginning of the training sessions I have met with consistent resistance, defensiveness, coldness. And now it really begins to make itself felt. I feel it everywhere I go on this ship. They do not want me here. They are beginning to hate me, if that is not already the case.

I have considered meeting this situation head on, calling a group session and bringing all of it out into the open. But that is not my usual way of doing things, and in any case I very much doubt that anything good would come of it. They would surely deny any such hostility, even accuse *me* of paranoia. I could make myself look very foolish indeed. I could make my position here still more untenable.

If they do not like me, let them at least fear me. Let me retain some kind of authority here. If this is how things must be, then I must play along with them. I will have to hold myself even further back, cultivate distance and secrecy, abandon any thought of behaving in my more usually friendly and outgoing manner. But all this is quite a strain, really quite a strain. Control have put me in an extremely difficult position here, and it can only get more difficult as time goes on.

Why is it that they dislike having me around? Are they so certain of their own vibrant mental health that they regard my presence here as not only redundant but actively insulting? Or are they, perhaps, each one concerned to protect his or her own most secret and deeply hidden fears, which they believe may spill out at any moment?

Or is it, perhaps, something about me?

Day Nine

Today, bored and restless, trying to find something to do, to make myself useful in some way, I went down to Linda Bachman's surgery. I explained to her that, as backup medical officer on this voyage, I thought that I ought to acquaint myself with the layout of the place, in anticipation of possible unforeseen emergencies.

"You're already acquainted," she said.

This was true, but I wandered around for some time, studying her cell slides and poking vaguely at her equipment. She seemed very anxious to get rid of me. Possibly

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she fears guilt by association. There may be a section or two of psychiatry buried deep in her past. Or else she feared some kind of sexual advance. She is, I must admit, the most attractive of the three women on this ship, at least to my taste. But surely I gave no sign of it? I must be clear on this point. There can be nothing like that. I simply cannot endanger my position. I must maintain my authority at all costs.

"Perhaps I can help out here," I offered, "on a day-to-day basis."

"There's nothing at all for you to do here," she said, "hardly enough for me."

And that was the end of the matter.

Further observations on the crew. Bachman, at least, is functioning well. Which is to be expected from her profile, which indicates a strong sense of self, good integration, autonomous decision-making faculties, and so forth. It is a pity that she, too, has been caught up in Webb's crusade against me.

Day Ten

It occurs to me that I should elaborate on this matter, this question of Captain Webb. I don't want to dismiss the man out of hand. His qualities of leadership are after all quite renowned. He survived crisis after crisis on the Outer Planets mission, tightened up discipline whenever it began to slip, salvaged triumph out of complete fiasco. He was also the very first man in null space, certainly a heroic step. And yet I have had my reservations about him all along.

What worries me is this: how will the man react in a real crisis, faced with something utterly routine, working beyond the reach of Mission Control and without any legal or moral precedents? It seems to me that the man is entirely too rigid, inflexible, rule-bound. The Outer Planets mission, however difficult, never crossed the boundaries of the known. This venture, it seems to me, is something entirely different.

Considering the vast resources they have expended in getting every single technical-type detail exactly right, it seems strange that Control should have paid so little attention to the human element. That's my problem, they told me, we picked you to look after all that sort of thing. They said this in all seriousness, although I imagine that they were laughing at me all the same. Control really do not expect any kind of trouble. My presence here has been dictated by the whim of some obscure subcommittee, but they themselves think it all so much nonsense and expect no call for my services at all.

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Day Twelve

I have become aware of a first sexual liaison among the crew, between Webb and Paine. Quite likely this is no new thing at all. It may well have begun well before the take-off, and I may be the very last to become informed on the matter.

Like Bachman and myself, Webb is a divorcee. Green and McVay have never been married, and Kruger is a widower. This was a matter of policy all along, picking unattached individuals, and Paine is unique in having a husband back on Earth. She was not, I believe, the first choice of Control, but in the event her husband offered no objections to her joining the mission and signed all the appropriate releases.

She has, at any rate, taken up with the captain, whom she no doubt views as ruggedly handsome in the style of so many vidshow spacemen and a true national hero to boot. This development is hardly startling and would be of no relevance whatsoever, but for its consequences for McVay. It seems that McVay has invested considerable time and energy in pursuit of Paine, and is now unable to conceal his disappointment and resentment.

It would seem to me that McVay never had much chance in the matter. He is, frankly, rather ugly, in fact unusually so. And his temperament is mean, besides. After me, he is the least liked member of the crew, and he has not been slow to realize his position. In consequence he has begun to take out some of his resentments on me.

"Pass the salt, shrink," he will say to me at meal periods. "Tell me a dirty story" or "Show us your shrunken heads." Really the most unbearable sort of banalities.

Possibly McVay will find satisfaction elsewhere, but I rather doubt it. Four men and three women. Not enough to go around whichever way you look at it. And Laura Green, our copilot, will have no part in it, none at all. That much is clear from her profiles: a hostility to men just barely short of the pathological.

It seems to me that I can detect a strong attachment on her part for Bachman, of a latent homosexual nature. Indeed, for all I know, Bachman may be responding in kind, they may already be lovers. Certainly Bachman has shown no interest in the advances of Webb and McVay, for which I can hardly blame her. But there is nothing in her profiles to indicate such a thing, and in any case this is all so much idle speculation, utterly useless gossip. I am keeping a journal, not writing a pulp novel.

Day Fourteen

I try to occupy myself with a

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small research project, the preparation of a theoretical paper aiming at a partial integration of Piaget and Freud. I read, I make notes. My mind wanders, I forget what I have just read, I fail to understand the meaning of my notes.

Piaget's children. So very charming. *When did the sun begin? It came in the War .... so that little children could have fresh air.* The children I used to treat were never so delightful, not in the least.

Day Sixteen

The atmosphere during mealtimes, our only truly communal activities, seems more and more strained. Even Webb is aware of this, and today, after dinner, he told several jokes, to merely polite laughter. One joke, which I found rather revealing, concerned an astronaut of the early exploratory days and his problems in disposing of his feces. Another involved the misadventures of a paraplegic in a German whorehouse.

I myself told a joke, the very old one about the child psychiatrist and the impossible child. The mother cannot deal with her child, she absolutely cannot deal with him. She asks the shrink to make a house call. The shrink arrives and takes the child to one side and whispers in his ear. Afterwards, the child is as good as gold.

"How did you do it?" the mother asked the shrink on their next meeting. "What did you say to him?"

"I told him," said the shrink, "that if he did not behave himself I would have to cut off his widdler."

No one laughed. No one. It is, I imagine, a joke with a rather specialized appeal.

Day Twenty

It begins, I think, the troubles begin. Unless I overexaggerate. That's possible. I admit, I may be entirely too eager for trouble, any kind of trouble, anything to make me feel useful around here.

It was, at the least, an extremely ugly incident. It occurred in the mess hall during the lunch period. McVay tried to pick a fight with Kruger. I'm not exactly sure why he picked on Kruger. It may be that Kruger's impassivity, his relentless stolidity, seem to him like a rebuke to his own disorderly emotional state. If that is so, then he is certainly mistaken, because no one should envy Kruger, not even McVay. Kruger's present state of mind appears to me to be entirely unenviable.

At any rate, McVay chose to raise the issue of Kruger's age. There may be an element of projection here, since McVay is himself close on forty and, after Kruger, the oldest member of the

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crew. Kruger is of course much older than that, and McVay hammered the point home remorselessly. Fifty-eight, he said, was no age to be traveling in space. Kruger should have stayed home and watered his potted plants, something like that.

"Look at you," he said. "Look how *old* you are."

Kruger, in any case, refused to be drawn. He simply sat there, as blank and indifferent as ever to all outward appearances, steadily working his way through his vegetable stew. This seemed to enrage McVay.

"Disgusting," he said, and it was hard to know whether he was referring to Kruger's age and physical state or simply to his eating habits, which admittedly leave something to be desired. I myself have been irritated by the noise with which Kruger eats. "You're disgusting."

I looked to Webb. He was viewing the scene with interest but made no motion to intervene. I took it upon myself.

"That's enough," I told him. "That's really quite enough."

He turned on me, infuriated. "Stay out of this," he said. "This is none of your business."

"But it is," I told him. "It is my business."

"You think you're going to shrink me?" Truly enraged now. "You think wrong, let me tell you that ...."

"You're overexcited," I told him. "A few sessions of alpha-wave training ...."

"No," he said. "No sessions of anything. Not from you. Nobody wants anything from you. So you can go take a running jump into null space."

"All right," said Webb. A tone of command, level but incisive, carrying easily across the room. "Stop that right now. Do you hear me? Right now."

McVay subsided, sullenly sat down and resumed his meal. I felt undermined, completely undermined. I turned to Webb.

"Thank you," I said. "But I didn't need any help."

"Help doesn't enter into it," he said. "There will be no brawling on this ship."

"In any case," I said, "I should like McVay to attend for therapy. In fact, all the crew might —"

"No," said Webb. "There will be none of that. None of that."

Day Twenty-four

McVay's behavior continues to deteriorate. He picks arguments, for no apparent reason, with anyone and about everything. He rails against Kruger, against me, and now most of all against Webb, though only in his absence. He is careful to maintain decorum in the

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captain's presence. His fear of him, so far, continues to outweigh his hostility.

With Paine he is quite brutal. "Slop," he screamed today at lunch, spilling out his ration on the floor. "What kind of slop do you call this?"

McVay needs help, in identifying the causes of his considerable emotional difficulties and in learning to deal with them. McVay needs help and I am the one to give it to him. My presence here was planned for this exact kind of contingency. But McVay will not enter into therapy voluntarily, and I cannot force him to do so. Only Webb can do that. It would in any case be extremely difficult to treat the man against his will, but I believe that we must make the effort. Otherwise, matters can only get worse.

The best thing to do, at this point, would be to call together the whole crew for some kind of group session. We could then explore McVay's feelings towards the rest of us, as well as our own feelings about him and about each other. We can all learn something from McVay, as he can learn from us.

Such a session will not take place without Webb's backing. And that will not be forthcoming, he left me in no doubt of that.

This morning, after breakfast, I sought out Webb. I was resolved to confront him with the possible consequences of continued inaction. I would, I had decided, have to suggest to him that I might find it necessary to make a full report of all this on our return. I did not reach this decision lightly. Our return is a very long way off, and we remain completely out of touch with Control. Webb, of necessity, remains the final authority here. He would not, I thought, take kindly to my threats, and he certainly has it in his power to make life for me here extremely unpleasant in a number of ways, worse even than at present.

Still, I resolved to confront him. It was, I thought, my duty to take some action. My duty as a member of this mission, as a healer of minds, and as a human being. Or so I told myself.

I located Webb in his control room, feet up on the deactivated control panels, staring rather blankly out the observation window into null space.

"Captain Webb," I said.

He looked up, clearly annoyed at my invasion of his private domain. "You're not allowed in here," he told me. "This is restricted. You're in breach of regulations."

"What harm can I do?" I asked him. "Isn't everything under computer control?"

"Leave the technical-type de-

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tails to people who can understand them," he said, irritably. "Just tell me what you want that's so important you have to run around breaking regulations."

I explained to him that McVay was running off the tracks, that several other crew members were showing considerable signs of the same strains. I proposed that we institute regular group sessions, to bring things out into the open and attempt to clear the air.

"Clear the air?" he echoed. "Dirty it, you mean. Dirty it with all kinds of filthy notions and ugly ideas. Wallowing in the mud of our own emotions. I know what you want, Stern. You want to play little tin god, but I can tell you right now that there will be none of it. I'm not going to give you the slightest chance, do you understand me? As long as I am captain of this ship, we will do things my way."

I was taken aback by the vehemence of his reaction.

"As to McVay," he continued, "all he needs is a good kick in the pants. Not even that, just a very good talking to. I'll deal with McVay, let me assure you of that. You think I don't know how to deal with people like McVay?"

"I insist," I said. "I insist that you give me your support. Otherwise I must warn you —"

"Warn me?" he shouted. "Warn me of what?"

"I must warn you," I continued, lamely enough, "that otherwise I cannot be held responsible for the consequences."

"That's all right," he said, crisply, "because there will be no consequences."

"You're making a mistake," I said. "McVay is just the first. There'll be more of this."

He held up his hand, palm facing outward, a stop signal.

"I don't care to discuss this any further. There will be no more discussion."

Day Thirty

Webb has apparently "talked to" McVay, who now appears more sullen and resentful than ever. For the moment he has ceased to make trouble, but he seems to have withdrawn into himself, directed all his rage inwards. Now he avoids all contact and communication with the crew, stays in his cabin for hours on end. I cannot view this as an improvement. McVay will surely get worse. And his deterioration will be my vindication. Not in any way a pleasant prospect, but perhaps this is the way it will have to be.

Day Thirty-three

How did I get myself into this? How did I ever get involved in this space business? This I ask myself, over and over. It has come to

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dominate my thoughts. Because, when I really think about it, it seems to make so little sense, on the surface of things at least. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, a wealth of the neurotic children of the neurotic rich, well set for a comfortable middle age, and I threw it all away. And all for this.

It was a joke, I told myself, an amusing piece of foolishness. Skimming one day through the APA bulletin, I came upon the advertisement for this position and paused, indulged myself in a momentarily pleasing fantasy. A flying shrink? Why not? Why not apply? They would surely not pick me; there would be many others much better qualified; there was little chance I would even rate an interview. I pursued the matter purely for my own amusement.

I was astounded when they called me in for an interview, quite astounded. I very nearly stopped there and then. But on reflection I thought that I might as well go along, cancel a day's appointments and go along and have myself a little more fun. I have always been fascinated by the mentality behind the space program, and here was my opportunity to observe things at first hand.

It was very dull, as it happened, that first interview. The committee, representatives of government and military and security and the project itself, seemed uninterested, even bored. The whole thing was oddly perfunctory. And then came another interview and another, security checks and medical examinations, one thing after another, and suddenly I was about to report for training at Control.

The competition, I realize now, must have been pitiful indeed. It was open only to those in civilian practice, to make up the civilian quota on the ship. And who else in their right mind would voluntarily pick up and leave on a junket like this? In any case, I must imagine that their selection processes were exceedingly sloppy. They had made their decision, opted to hire a shrink, and picked the first or second one that came along so that they could put an end to the matter there and then, balance their books and forget all about it. A useful sort of thing, after all, having a shrink along. It gives the impression of being prepared for all eventualities, whatever the real facts of the matter.

Control, I am now convinced, never believed that my presence would be necessary. They never really saw any possibility of any very serious disorder developing here, in this confined space, under these exeptional stresses. Otherwise they would surely have awarded me greater authority.

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As for their talk of aliens, problems of alien psychology, this is so much nonsense, from their point of view, since they expect no such thing. Control do not expect to find anyone out there, anyone at all, only more dead and empty worlds. They believe that we are alone, all alone in this universe, free to ravage as we please.

How, then, did I ever allow myself to get involved in this enterprise? Was it simply to satisfy my overworked imagination? As a child I greatly enjoyed reading stories of space travel. Blast-offs, atomic motors flaring, the relentless pressure of acceleration, battling the Russians on the Moon, meteor swarms menacing the giant domes, communing with dying races beside dead canals. I found it all quite extraordinary. And I craved the extraordinary, craved it all the more as I read on and on. I needed it, I think, to escape the dullness, the deadly day-to-day unspeakable dullness of childhood.

But a grown man? I can hardly credit it. Was I that bored? Or was I hungry for fame and recognition? Was I trying to prove something? And if so, what? It remains beyond my comprehension.

Martha thought it all very amusing, one of the funniest things she had ever heard. I remember it quite distinctly, that weekend when I went to pick up the kids to take them to the zoo. I told her then that I would be leaving soon, heading out for Alpha Centauri. I assured her that I would be making adequate provision with my lawyers for the children's maintenance during the full term of my absence and that I had made out my will in the event of my failure to return.

She listened to all this in silence. When I concluded, she broke into laughter, paroxysms of laughter.

"You?" she asked. "A star-man?"

The concept was too much for her to take in. She laughed and laughed, until actual tears began to run down her face and edgy thoughts of violence began to cross my mind.

"That's right," I said. "Me."

"But why?" she asked, still laughing. She would laugh me all the way out of the house, a truly gross display. "Why?"

Day Thirty-seven

Nothing happens, and then more nothing. I have abandoned my research. I am reading my way through the library's stock of mystery novels. I am working on two jigsaw puzzles simultaneously. I keep myself occupied as best I can and otherwise spend much time speculating on almost everything, to no purpose whatsoever. There is very little I have to say.

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Day Thirty-nine

Will we find aliens on the planets of Ą. Centauri? Or will our ship perhaps attract the attention of another, more developed space-faring race on its lonely patrol through this quadrant of space? I hope so, I hope very much that we will meet aliens. Any kind will do, any kind at all, stone-age Centaurans or godlike creatures from the Magellanic Cloud, it's all the same to me.

Still, I would have to admit that it is the second possibility which interests me most, almost certainly because it is so very unlikely, a chance in a billion at best. "Greetings Earthmen," they will say, these fantastic all-wise creatures. "We have been waiting so long to welcome you to the Galactic Federation."

And then again, perhaps they won't be so very all-wise; perhaps they'll be a bunch of somewhat confused humanoids much like ourselves, a very long way from home without very good reason. That could turn out to be a very edgy business indeed. In fact, I have begun to sketch out a speculation along these lines, dealing with the sort of problems that might arise from just such a scenario:

"First Contact," by Seymour Stern

"Our problem," said the Earth captain brusquely, as was his manner, "is this. We're concerned about the possibility of you following us home. I'm being perfectly frank with you now; I'm telling it exactly like it is. We're worried that you people are going to trail us home and then invade us and ravage our homes and loot our precious metals and rape our women."

"Dear me," said the Alien captain, "is that what you think?"

"Speaking personally," said the Earth captain, "simply as humanoid to humanoid, I have to say that I myself don't see this as a particularly likely scenario. But you must understand how we would have to weigh up this particular alternative. I mean, you surely wouldn't deny that the same thought has occurred to you? That we might follow you home?"

"But by all means," said the Alien captain. "Please do. You'd be entirely welcome. We'd like nothing better than for you to follow us home and invade us and ravage our homes and loot our precious metals and rape our women. Nothing would be so exciting."

Day Forty-seven

I've been avoiding returning to this journal. Looking back on what I've written so far, it seems to me increasingly pathological, this compulsive outpouring, this obsessive

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recounting of events, this driving need to justify myself. Nothing is happening here, nothing at all, except that seven people are on a spaceship heading for Alpha Centauri and a couple of them are showing mild signs of strain and, apart from that, nothing is happening at all. Webb is right, and McVay is merely an indisciplined and poorly socialized individual who needed putting firmly in his place, and his behavior at its worst was no more than mildly bothersome.

I am thinking, in fact, of giving up on this journal right now and getting down to work on some real honest-to-goodness fiction, possibly in the style of my last entry. That might at least keep me amused until we finally arrive and something really starts to happen: I have often thought of trying my hand at a novel or something of the like. I have many interesting experiences and observations which I could profitably draw upon.

But then again, perhaps this would be a dangerous step, a step further away from reality. "Novels," J. Piaget has said, "are not pathological." But I wonder, I wonder about that.

Day Forty-nine

Today, for the first time, I attended the regularly scheduled nondenominational weekly prayer meeting. Webb, in private life a lay preacher in an evangelical low-church group, presided. Paine was also in attendance, and Kruger, and me, and that was all. I was somewhat surprised to see Kruger. His records do not present him as a religious man.

It was a rather dull affair, over quickly. Webb did not seem to have his mind on the reading, which was from the Gospels, I'm not sure where. He mispronounced words, lost the sense of the sentences. My mind wandered. I thought about God. Is that, I wondered, what we are doing out here? Looking for God? We didn't find him on the Moon, nor among the outer planets, but perhaps we may still find him lurking around out here, in the region of A. Centauri. Possibly we will be able to persuade him to return home with us. Possibly this is the unstated aim of our mission.

Day Fifty

I have conceived a possibly amusing fiction:

"The Return," by Seymour Stern

The spaceship, silvery white and several miles long, blotted out the sun over the United Nations building in New York. Air Force units observed from a distance but made no move to attack. Missiles were readied. The city was evacuated. The world waited.

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At last the ship opened communications. "All right," said the voice, cutting in simultaneously on all TV and radio broadcasts on the face of the planet, in every language known to man. "This is it."

Those observing the event on TV saw an old man, his skin of indeterminate color, with a neatly trimmed white beard and short white hair thinning somewhat in front. He wore a blue serge business suit, a blue denim shirt and a paisley tie.

"The spaceship is irrelevant," said the old man. "You can forget the spaceship."

The spaceship flickered out of existence. The broadcast continued.

"Well, now," said the old man, "I'm back. I'm very sorry it's been so long, but I've been extremely tied up in events entirely beyond your rather pitiful comprehension. In any case, I'm back and I'm not pleased, let me tell you this. I'm not pleased at all about the way you people have been carrying on."

The old man was glaring now, a very fierce expression.

"Let's get one thing clear from the start," he said. "There are going to be some changes around here. Let's be very clear on that point."

Day Fifty-seven

Something, finally, happened. Today, at last, something happened and I think it very clearly proved my point. I think it shows that I was right all along. I don't think there can be any question about that.

This is what happened: McVay, obviously in a state of great agitation, burst into the mess hall during the evening meal. This in itself was surprising, since McVay has been scrupulously avoiding all contact with the crew for the past few weeks.

He looked around the mess hall, then came directly to me. Everyone was present except Paine and Webb, but he came to me. He gripped my arm, tightly.

"Look," he said, "I've figured it out. I've worked it all out now and I've had quite enough of this and I want out of here right now. I want to forget all about all this and just go home."

"What?" I asked, genuinely bewildered.

"I want out," he said, his voice rising towards hysteria, his fingers digging deeper and deeper into my arm. "I've had enough."

"I don't understand," I said. "I don't understand what you mean."

"Don't give me that," he said. "Because I've had it. I'm up to here with all your bullshit. I'm up to here with you and Webb and all the rest of these bastards. I can't stand

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the sight of any of you any more and I want out of here. Don't you understand? *I've figured it out.* This is just another simulation, just another test, we're not in space at all. There is no space drive, it's all a complete nonsense, and I want out of here right now."

"This notion you have," I said, picking my words carefully, "though quite without basis in fact is not as unusual as you might imagine. As far back as Buzz Aldrin —"

"Don't give me that," he said. "Don't give me that crap."

Webb chose this moment to enter. He stood in the doorway, clearly outraged at the scene.

"What's going on?" he asked. "What do you people think you're doing?"

McVay released my arm, turned on Webb.

"You too," he said. "I see you too, I see right through you and I'm not taking any more of your crap, you mealy-mouthed tight-assed bastard. Because *I know.* I know that this is all some kind of elaborate little game and I'm not going to play it any more."

Webb's face darkened with rage.

"Stop this gibberish," he said. "Shut up." He couldn't believe that McVay could be so disrespectful as to go mad in his presence.

"No," said McVay. "Not this time and never again. In fact, I think I just may kill you. Nothing would give me greater pleasure right now. And that would certainly put an end to this whole miserable business."

That said, he launched himself at Webb, hands grasping for his throat. Webb, caught off balance, fell backwards, with McVay still clinging to him. I went to help. Paine assisted me. Kruger stared on impassively. Together with Webb, we managed to restrain McVay long enough for Bachman to put him under sedation.

McVay is in his room now, locked in like some animal. We are keeping him under sedation for the time being. Webb has told me to commence therapy "when he calms down." I wonder, though, if he will ever calm down.

Day Fifty-eight

McVay's psychosis seems to me, within the limits of my present facilities, quite impenetrable. He is fixated on Webb, on killing Webb. This is all he wants to do, now. This, he believes, will straighten everything out once and for all.

Webb seems unconcerned. "He just couldn't cut it," he told me, "couldn't take the heat. We don't need him."

"What," I asked, "will happen to the engines?"

"Nothing will happen to them."

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I proposed to Webb that we should now institute regular and compulsory group sessions, in accordance with my earlier suggestion. This, I argued, would help prevent any repetition of what we had just gone through with McVay, which need never have happened if McVay's hostilities had been recognized and dealt with earlier.

"Unnecessary," Webb told me. "McVay was simply an isolated occurrence. Nothing like this has ever happened before and nothing like it will happen again. There will be no repetition."

I expressed my concern about Kruger. "There's nothing wrong with Kruger," he said, flatly. "There's a man who can keep himself to himself, and I see nothing wrong in that at all."

Day Sixty

McVay's breakdown appears to have had a distressing effect on the crew. There is a general atmosphere of depression. There is no mention of McVay by name. "He's sedated," says Bachman. "He's been fed," says Paine. And that's the sum of it.

Day Sixty-three

Today Bachman called me to her surgery. I was surprised, indeed mystified, having had so little contact with her these past weeks. Laura Green was there, and quite hysterical. "Keep him away," she said, as I entered the room. "Keep him away."

Green believes that she has been assaulted and raped by Captain Webb. This is a very serious sort of charge, and Bachman's physical examination does not seem to back it up. She can find no evidence of assault or of any recent sexual contact. I must presume, then, that her belief is delusional in nature. Bachman seems less positive. "It's possible," she says. "Webb might have tried something."

She would not tell me whether or not she was speaking from experience.

Day Sixty-five

Like dominoes, they begin to topple, one after another. Kruger is on his way now, on his way out. I collided with him in the doorway of the library and asked him how he was.

"This is madness," he replied, quite inappropriately but in a conversational tone. "Madness."

"What?" I asked him. "What is?"

"All of it," he said. He swept his arms around to take in the whole ship. "Madness."

"Our voyage?" I said. "It's perfectly rational. It has the soundest possible basis in political

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and economic reality."

"Madness," he said, firmly. "Madness."

"Am I mad?" I asked. "Is Paine? Bachman?" I tried to think of someone else I could safely add to that list.

"For sure," Kruger said, heavily, doggedly. "All. We all."

I confronted Webb again. Once again I found him staring out into the null space. "This can't go on," I told him. "We must take steps."

"No," he said. "Nothing is going on. Nothing at all." But his tone seemed less authoritative than simply petulant. He seemed to me somehow shrunken, diminished, lacking his usual conviction. This is taking its toll of him, also, even him.

And this bothers me most of all: that Webb also will fall apart, completely without warning. I don't know if any of us would survive that eventuality.

Day Seventy

Stasis. The crew functions, barely. Green is back at her post, though under heavy medication. She avoids the male members of the crew, even poor Kruger, who seems more depressed than ever. There is no conversation at meal periods now. The only constant sound is the faint and muffled voice of McVay, raving on and on.

I have tried to discuss the situation with Bachman. "Leave me alone," she said. "I don't care to think about it right now, if you don't mind."

Day Eighty-two (?)

I'm not sure what day this is. I'm making a guess. I could always ask Webb, but I don't care to speak to him, and it doesn't seem to matter very much, whichever way you look at it. Another day, anyway, another day.

I sleep a long time now, as long as possible. I take long naps during the day, inducing them by auto-hypnosis when they fail to come naturally. I use mild narcotics at night. It seems to help, this sleep. It helps pass the time.

Day Ninety

Paine came to see me this afternoon, waking me up in the course of a vivid and strange dream, a dream of savages in the African bush, as seen in so many travelogues. Paine told me what day it is. She explained that she had come to see me because something was troubling her and she could not see who else she might discuss it with.

She was, she told me, having an affair with Captain Webb, as I was no doubt already aware. This, in any case, was not the problem. While she did indeed feel a certain

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guilt about her husband back home and still cared for him deeply, they had talked all this through long ago and agreed that it was unreasonable in all ways for them to remain celibate for the better part of a year.

No, the problem was Webb. She was becoming very concerned about Webb. Something was the matter with the man. There had been occasional fits of rage in the past, over quickly and signifying nothing, but their frequency and ferocity seemed greatly increased now, sometimes accompanied by actual violence. He had hit her, she said, on several occasions, and quite hard at that.

And then there was this habit of his, this extremely disturbing habit, of sitting for hours at a time staring out into the null space.

"That's what Kruger does," she told me. "I've seen him. I think that's what's behind all this."

I agreed that it was not a healthy habit, though I did not believe that it was behind anything at all. I agreed that Webb was in need of treatment. But what is to be done? What am I supposed to do?

Day Ninety-two

I have made a most painstaking study of the ship's regulations, and I have found that Webb can be pronounced unfit for duty by Bachman on any one of a number of criteria, including emotional instability. On this latter subject she is to consider, though not necessarily act upon, the recommendations of the ship's psychiatric officer, myself. In the event of Bachman finding Webb unfit, command would devolve upon Green. The succession after that runs through McVay, Bachman, Paine, myself, and then Kruger.

I pointed out this passage in the regulations to Bachman and made my recommendation. She seemed appalled.

"You're talking about mutiny," she said. "Do you realize that?"

She refuses to face up to the situation, and that is the end of the matter.

Day Ninety-five

Kruger made no appearance today, which was not in itself unusual. Then someone, Paine, I believe, remarked that she hadn't seen him around in what seemed like a very long time. Thinking about this, I realized that I had not seen Kruger in at least a week. I decided to investigate.

His cabin door was locked. I hammered on it for some time. Finally I got Webb to cancel the field. Inside. Kruger was stretched out on his bed, fully dressed. I thought at first that he was taking a nap, but he was quite cold to the touch and quite stiff.

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An overdose, Bachman has reported, of antidepressants, a prescription from before the voyage. He has been dead at least three days.

Day Ninety-six

Webb, to my surprise, finally consented to a group session. He took pains to point out to me how little he personally thought of the idea, but he was willing to give it a try, if only for the sake of the weaker members of the crew, who may after all need this sort of thing.

The loss of Kruger has shaken him up, at least to some extent. His will is weakening. I am pleased about that and at the same time apprehensive.

The session, in any event, was something of a fiasco. I began by requesting their speculations on Kruger's motives in taking his life.

"He was sick," Paine offered. "In his mind."

"But why?" I probed. "About what?"

Paine could not extend her line of thought.

"Male postmenopausal distress," Bachman said, in a detached, medical sort of tone. "Hormonal in nature, probably, and at any rate nothing to do with us."

"That's right," Webb agreed. "No one is to blame. It was just one of those things."

Unexpectedly, Green spoke up, to disagree with Webb. "Maybe he was right," she said. "Maybe he did the right thing. Exactly the right thing."

She spoke quickly, her eyes fixed on some point in the floor.

"You're not looking at Captain Webb," I pointed out.

"Why should I look at Captain Webb?" she asked, staring up at me now. "What should I look at? There's nobody there at all. There's no one home."

"What do you mean?" asked Webb. "What do you mean by that?"

"Did someone say something?" Green asked me.

"Nonsense," said Webb. "Childish nonsense."

"But it has meaning," I said. "Everything has meaning."

"Gibberish," Webb said. "And this whole thing is a complete charade."

He got up, stalked out.

I turned to the rest of the group, diminished as it was. I asked for someone to explain what had just taken place. Silence. Blank expressions.

"Tell me," I said, "how Green feels about the captain. And why."

Paine spoke up. "I saw a vidshow once," she told us. "It was about ... could it be that Laura hates the captain because he reminds her of someone. Maybe

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her father?" she added, hopefully.

I looked to Green for some reaction. There was none.

"Well?" I probed. "What do you think?"

"Are you kidding?" she asked. "Do you really think I'm going to go through that little number? You've got another think coming."

Day Ninety-seven

There will be no more sessions. Webb is quite clear on that point.

Day One Hundred

McVay is dead. He escaped, exactly how no one is sure. Possibly he built up a tolerance to his medications. There was some kind of carelessness, at least. During his feeding session he was somehow able to overpower Paine, knock her unconscious. He then went looking for Webb and found him in the control room.

All this I have on hearsay. I did not see any of it. It is a reconstruction of events.

"Stop it," McVay apparently said to Webb, or words to that effect. "Stop this right now."

And Webb shot him. Burned him down with a laser pistol.

"The man was dangerous," he explained. "He had a knife."

McVay was in fact holding a rather blunt dinner fork.

What remains of McVay is now in cold storage, next to Kruger, wrapped up in cellophane among the frozen meat. We have eaten no meat since Kruger was stored there. Paine refuses to go down there, and in any case none of us has much taste for it now.

I proposed that we eject the bodies from the ship.

"Into null space? Are you crazy?"

Out there, I am led to understand, Kruger and McVay might very likely become infinite in mass. And this might well have unprecedented consequences for the universe as we know it. Or so certain theorists have suggested, though I may say that it all sounds a little overdramatic to me.

Orbit Alpha Centauri Two

I don't like the look of it, not in the least. I just don't like the *color*, an ugly, dirty sort of grey for the most part, with areas of paler grey and patches of putrid brown, altogether an unhealthy sort of visage. The darker grey, Webb informs me, is ice, lots of ice. This planet is apparently in the midst of an immense glaciation. It will be cold down there, very cold; there is no question about that.

It's a relief, in one way, finally getting out of the null space, being able to look outside and see stars and a sun and even this planet. But we're all too tense now, too edgy and short-tempered and generally

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mean to fully appreciate the difference. There's a great deal of hostility here, between all of us, and it's only barely being kept in check. And the general feeling, I think, is that the worst may not yet be behind us.

We have expelled Kruger and McVay from the ship. Due to a slight miscalculation, they linger still, a few hundred yards from the ship, exploded lumps of flesh and ice that drift in and out of sight.

Webb scheduled a celebration dinner in honor of our arrival, demanding roast beef from the lockers. He ate heartily, though no one else had much appetite.

"Let us pray," Webb said, before the meal.

Pray for what? I could not think of anything I cared to pray for. Not even a safe return to Earth. In fact, when I think of Earth now, I feel a kind of loathing. I think only of those millions and millions of people milling and jostling and pushing in upon me with their relentless problems and conflicts and hatreds. I see no safety anywhere.

Afterwards, Webb launched the TV drones.

What the drones see: Ice and more ice, an apparently endless wasteland of ice. Then at last they move beyond it, and the scenery becomes flat and grim, with ugly trees and sparse vegetation, blasted by the wind. It is not an attractive or inviting sight.

Then a herd of animals. Not a herd, a small pack with riders, humanoid riders, actual Alphanes. They are primitive-looking but remarkably humanlike, covered in animal skins and thick body hair. In close-up their features are somewhat Mongoloid, with slanted eyes and prominent cheekbones and bulging heads and flat and expressionless faces. Collectively, a rather ferocious sort of bunch.

The animals resemble bisons, though not completely; they have no exact Earth equivalent.

The Alphanes carry poles, long wooden poles with sharpened ends. They are at least moderately advanced, then, and Kruger would probably have found all this quite fascinating, though I myself find it difficult to raise any interest at all.

The drones move past them and on towards a campsight, a small makeshift array of crude tents, grouped in three concentric circles. In the outer circle sit a few more heavily bearded and furred Alphanes, carrying weapons, apparently on guard duty. They looked tired and haggard. A few nurse wounds.

In the middle circle, children run wild, runtish stunted children with imbecilic expressions. One cannot tell, of course, but to me they appear imbecilic. Swarms of

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flies buzz around the children, rising from the remains of old animal carcasses. The children attack each other with large bones. It is a very repulsive sort of scene, and already I have a sense of foreboding, a vague but powerful foreboding.

In the inner circle are the women, only women, young women and older women, from barely pubertal to premenopausal, none apparently older than that. They, too, have much body hair, though not quite as much, and hardly any facial hair.

I speculate vaguely on their form of social arrangement. Is this a permanent arrangement, this separation of women from the men? And if so, what function does it fulfill? This is Kruger's preserve, not mine, it is an area of thought in which I remember little and about which I care less.

And then we see the chief, if that is what he is, dead center in the camp, sitting outside the biggest tent of all, in the middle of the circle of women. The chief is a man, bigger and fatter than the scrawny specimens in the hunting party. Older, too, with flecks of gray showing through his filthy, matted hair.

"This is historic," says Webb. "Intelligent life. We must land and make contact."

"No," I say, alarmed, obscurely but deeply alarmed. "We should leave well enough alone. Make our films and our geological survey and then get out of here."

"Ridiculous," says Webb. "Utterly ridiculous. Exactly the kind of craven suggestion I should have expected from you. We came here to do a job and we're going to do it, have no doubt about that. I am the leader of this expedition and I say that we must make contact. Anything else would be transparent dereliction of duty."

The First Landing

And so we landed not far from camp, descended by ladder to the alien ground. We wore respiratory aids. The atmosphere is a little thin, and we must protect ourselves from unknown germs.

Webb was down first. I thought for a moment that he was going to kneel and kiss the ground in some elaborately scripted gesture for the benefit of the vidcameras now running. And he did kneel, but only to dig his fingers into the rock-hard dirt, raising only a little dust, which he very gravely scooped into a bottle and passed to Paine.

Paine was carrying the flag. Webb took it and planted it with much difficulty in the ground, swearing under his breath all the while. Finally he got it in, and we all stood around waiting for him to say something appropriate.

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"Well," he said. "We're here."

He recited a prayer.

It was cold, bitterly cold, even beneath our heavy protective clothing.

Webb disconnected the cameras. "All right," he said. "Let's get on with it."

He called for volunteers to accompany him to the camp. Everyone was eligible except Green, who would have to stay with the ship in case Webb did not return.

Paine shook her head from side to side. She had no intention of going into that camp, and I could not blame her.

Webb looked at me and at Bachman and at me again.

"Why not?" Bachman said, finally. She stepped forward.

"All right," I said, "I'll come too."

Webb issued us laser guns. I felt strange, wearing the gun, though at Control I had received extensive training in its use. Before that, I had never even touched one. It was a peculiar sensation, carrying a gun, possessing all that power. With this gun, I thought, I can do anything. Burn down Webb, take Bachman, anything. The thought passed quickly, leaving my cheeks burning with shame.

We broke out a groundcar and bumped our way across the plain towards the camp. We met with no opposition from the perimeter guards. They stood still and stared at us, frozen and appalled. I feared for a moment that they might fall to the ground and worship us, but this did not transpire. They were simply slow-witted, not reverent.

The camp was even more squalid than I had imagined, a filthy and evil-smelling place. The children, as we passed, were torturing some kind of small animal, poking it with sticks and pelting it with stones. They began to run in our wake.

The women, as we approached, began shrieking, possibly some kind of ritual response to the invasion of their territory. The women were thin and sickly looking, bones projecting tight against exposed skin, hair matted with parasites.

Webb carried with him a bag of trinkets, gifts from Control in the event of a Primitive Man Scenario. In some ways, Control were unusually prescient. In others, they have been quite disastrously short-sighted.

We reached the tent of the chief. Webb descended from the car. "Cover me," he said. Bachman and I held our guns at the ready. I felt like a bit player in a mediocre war movie. The whole thing was at once quite unreal and extraordinarily banal.

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Webb spilled out his bag of trinkets at the feet of the chief. The chief motioned for the women to pick them up. This they did, passing him a handful of beads, cheap glass beads of the kind you might by in any chain store. The headman chose a large purple one, stared at it with a puzzled expression. Clearly he did not see its exact function. He rubbed it against his skin, pushed it up his nose, bit it, sucked it, finally spat it out.

It was time for the cigarette-lighter trick. Webb produced it with a flourish, flicked it alight several times, and passed it to one of the women who passed it to the chief. The chief repeated the whole pantomime, turning it over and over, biting it, sucking, rubbing it against his skin. He ignited it accidentally and burnt his arm and dropped it with a yell.

It was a tense moment. But the chief again motioned to the women to pick it up. Handling it very carefully this time, he managed to operate it correctly. He seemed pleased. He seemed to smile. He came forward and embraced Webb. He motioned for him to enter his tent.

Webb turned back to us. "Come down," he said. Reluctantly, we got down, and followed him to the entry flap of the tent. Behind us the women and children began to swarm over the groundcar, touching it and licking it and generally giving it the closest possible examination.

We began to enter the tent. The chief stopped short and stared intently at Bachman. He reached out a hairy hand and squeezed her breast. She shouted in alarm. I began to bring my gun up, but Webb restrained me. The chief backed up, indicated that Bachman would have to remain outside. And so it was. As I followed them into the tent, the women clustered around Bachman, jostling her and sniffing her and fondling the material of her clothes.

There was a fire inside and it was very hot, hot and smoky and unbelievably filthy, with bones and animal grease everywhere. Close up, the chief gave off a rather horrific stench. I fought back a retch.

We sat around the fire. The chief shouted something, and the women came in, bringing food and drink, hardly cooked lumps of flesh and vile-smelling liquid full of dead insects. The chief ate, we pretended to.

Webb attempted to strike up a conversation. He pointed to himself. "Man," he said.

With his other hand he pointed directly up to the ceiling. The chief examined the ceiling with some curiosity. Webb then made swooping motions with both arms, and

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the chief broke into what seemed to be laughter.

I was embarrassed by Webb's idiotic gestures, which I knew were being recorded faithfully by the camera on my lapel, just as my gestures were being recorded by Webb, for posterity and no doubt for later editing into a feature-length documentary, titled, perhaps, *Five To Centauri*.

"Let's get out of here," I said. "Now."

"Relax," said Webb, clearly enjoying himself.

"Man," he said again, to the chief, pointing to himself and then to me. "Woman," he said, pointing to the flap of the tent.

The chief laughed again. He shouted something uncomprehensible. There was a scuffling noise outside. Alarmed, I tugged at Webb's sleeve.

"Where's Bachman?" I asked. "What are they doing to Bachman?"

Webb pointed to the flap again. "Woman," he said. His hands described curves in the air. The chief looked back blankly. Webb made an obscene gesture. The chief laughed once again.

Then the women came in, dragging Bachman. She was unconscious, or perhaps semiconscious, at any rate unaware of what was happening. There was a large bruise on her forehead, and there were shallow knife cuts all over her naked body where they had cut through her clothes. She was still wearing her boots.

The women dumped her down in front of the chief, who began to mount her.

"No," said Webb. "Wait."

He pulled out his gun and fired rather wildly, burning down an entire wall of the tent and incinerating several Alphane women in the process. I brought my own gun up but did not fire. There seemed no further need. The chief was staring at Webb in apparent astonishment. I grabbed Bachman and pulled her to her feet. The women were moaning, swaying backward and forward like corn in a wind, some kind of archaic fear reaction.

We backed out of the tent. The groundcar was still swarming with children.

"Get off," screamed Webb, obviously panicked. "Get out of there."

He fired again, slicing the heads off several children. Screaming in dismay, the rest took flight, running in all directions, some swarming directly into us, milling around and making it impossible to move forward. Webb was knocked to his knees. I almost lost my grip on Bachman. The noise of the screaming children was unearthly and quite appalling, and I shall

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remember it for a very long time.

Somehow I staggered through to the groundcar, which was covered with a sticky film of blood, already beginning to freeze over. I threw Bachman into the back, next to the torsos of several children. I activated the controls.

"Wait," shouted Webb. "Wait."

His clothes were torn; he staggered as if in a drunken stupor, waving his gun in the air, but he made it through to the groundcar. We took off, fast.

A wall of people blocked our path, a wall of milling women and children. The whole camp was in an uproar. Involuntarily, I slowed.

"Drive through," Webb yelled, above the clamor. "Straight through."

He stomped his foot down hard on top of mine over the drive pedal. I howled in pain, and the car jerked forward, straight through the melee, sending bodies flying all around. In this manner we got out of the camp.

Webb ordered take-off immediately. We did not even stop to load the groundcar, which was consumed in the flames of the rockets. Green handled the take-off and the establishment of a new orbit. Webb was too shaken to take part.

A Conference

"All right," said Webb. "So we screwed up. So we try again."

We were all present, even Bachman. She had come out of shock very quickly and was not damaged by her experience, although she still shuddered involuntarily from time to time.

Everyone looked to me. It seemed to be my role to express the first objections.

"I don't think you understand," I said, carefully, "exactly what we're facing."

"I understand," Webb said. "I understand that we are facing a bunch of total primitives and that we were absolutely crazy to let one of our women within a mile of them and that would never have happened in the first place if they hadn't given me this crew full of weaklings and women who cracked up for no reason at all leaving me without a single person I could depend on when it got down to the real business of the voyage." He paused for breath. "In any case," he concluded, "you can bet you life it won't happen again."

"We were lucky," I told him. "We were lucky to get away at all. We were lucky that most of his sons were out hunting."

"Sons?" echoed Webb, curiously.

I realized that I was saying something I had been unable even to consider.

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"What do you mean?" asked Webb.

I stared mutely around the conference table.

"Go on," said Bachman.

"I can't be sure," I said. "I may be misreading the setup entirely. Kruger would be the one to say for sure about a thing like this, and he might have found every reason to disagree with me. The idea is, after all, old-fashioned and generally discredited. I myself am not a pure Freudian but an eclectic, and I have always accepted it as an interesting myth, of purely symbolic value, rather than an actual account of the way things were."

"What?" asked Webb, quite mystified. "What are you talking about?"

"The notion," I said, and the words seemed to stick in my throat, "of the primal family. The horde."

There was no reaction, shocked or otherwise. I proceeded with my exposition, and it became easier as I went along.

"In taking up this idea," I said, "Freud was only elaborating on earlier speculations of such thinkers as Darwin and Atkinson. And as I have said, he was mining it primarily for its value as an explanatory model, much like the Greek myth —"

"Horde?" Webb interrupted, as I was moving into full flow. "What do you mean, horde?"

I briefly sketched out for him Freud's scheme of prehistory, as summarized from my patchy recollections. I outlined the previously unverified, indeed unverifiable, notion that at the dawn of time man had lived in primal family groupings, each one ruled over by an absolute father who possessed all the women and terrorized all his sons.

Webb, at first, gave every appearance of shock. "That's disgusting," he interjected several times. But towards the close of my discourse he seemed to be getting used to the idea, indeed quite captivated by it.

"That one guy," he said, "is their father?"

"Presumably," I said, "although certain digressions might occur."

"And he's the boss because he's the oldest and toughest and smartest?"

"That would be the general idea."

Webb whistled through his teeth, a grating sort of noise.

"You know," he said, "in a way, it makes sense. It makes a kind of sense."

"Not genetically," Bachman said. "Genetically it makes no sense at all. In fact it's hard to imagine how such an arrangement could sustain itself. Even if Stern's analysis is correct, this must surely

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be a very recent thing, possibly a result of some large geophysical change that has scattered and divided the humanoids here, broken them down into small foraging parties run on family lines."

But Webb was far away, quite transported.

"All the women?" he said. "All his daughters? And granddaughters?"

"All of them."

The Second Landing

Webb made the decision, overriding all our objections. We would make another landing and attempt to contact another humanoid grouping.

"We have a job to do," he said, "And it will be done. Do you understand me?"

His behavior had become more autocratic than ever. He appeared to me to be dangerously close on paranoia.

We landed in the late evening, some hundred miles to the south of our first touchdown, close by another camp. We, Webb and I, would pay our respects in the morning. This, at least, was his plan, although nothing ever came of it.

I woke in the night, just before dawn, greatly alarmed. I could hear screaming in the corridors of the ship, and for one moment I thought it was McVay, returned to haunt us. But the screaming was very loud and very close, just a few rooms away, and it sounded very real. I ran into the corridor. The noise was coming from behind Bachman's door, which was locked. I wasted a few moments hammering upon it, then ran back to my room for my gun and burned the lock out.

Inside, I found Webb, half naked, striking Bachman, striking her repeatedly with his fists. She was on her bed, dressed in her nightclothes, screaming and moaning. I wondered if I was still dreaming. In its repetitiveness and its dreary banality the scene had all the earmarks of a nightmare.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

Webb looked up at me, glared. "Get out of here," he said. "Right now." He continued to beat Bachman.

"You're hurting her," I said.

"She likes it," he said. "And deserves it."

Webb, I thought, was out of his mind.

"You're out of your mind," I said, pointing the gun at him. "Stop that."

Webb did not stop. He ignored me completely.

"Listen to me," I shouted. "You'd better listen to me because *this is it*. I've had enough. We've all had enough."

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My voice sounded hysterical in my ears. Even McVay was more calm.

This time Webb took notice. He smiled. He left Bachman alone and took a step towards me. "What do you think?" he asked. "You think you're going to shoot me? Is that what you think?"

He took another step.

"Stop," I said. "Right there."

He took another step.

There was, then, a thump against the wall, a dull thump against the wall of the room which was also the wall of the ship. And another thump. And another. It was as if someone was banging on the side. But we were at least thirty feet up in the air. Unless there were giants loose in the land, some kind of missiles were being hurled at us.

"Attack," said Webb. "The ship is under attack."

Heedless to personal safety he ran right past me and out of the room, presumably heading for his control room. I felt cheated. I wondered if I would have shot him.

Through the observation window, in the dim morning light, I could see a horrific sight. A swarm of natives, perhaps a hundred or more, throwing sticks and rocks and stones at the ship.

"What's happening?" asked Bachman, climbing unsteadily to her feet, gasping with pain, sobbing. She walked to the window with some difficulty and stared out, her face blank.

"Green was right," she said, "even if she was wrong."

"And Kruger," I said.

Bachman looked down at the natives. "He'll kill them," she said, flatly, "kill them all. And us, all of us."

Belatedly I followed Webb to the control room, where the boards were all alive and lights were flashing and dials spinning.

"What are you doing?" I asked, stupidly enough, for it was quite obvious what he was doing.

"Blasting off," he said. "Out of this hell hole."

"But you'll kill them," I said. "You'll kill them all."

I thought of the swarm around our rocket jets and shuddered at the thought of all that incinerated flesh.

"So what?" he asked.

Green arrived then, with Paine close behind. They stopped in the doorway, looking quite dumfounded by the scene, me holding a gun on Webb.

"Use the lasers," I urged him. "Fire over their heads. Warn them off."

But Webb was beyond reason.

"You think I care about them? About those ..." He seemed lost for the word. "... savages," he said, finally. "Filthy, excrement-covered savages."

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The ship began to sway, to rock gently from side to side.

"They're tilting the ship," Webb said.

He rushed to the window. I peered over his shoulder. It was true. They were trying to topple the ship, grouped on one side of it and pushing very hard.

"We must save the ship," Webb said. "Save it."

He ran back towards his instrument panel.

"No," I said. "I'll kill you first."

"Put that thing down," Webb said. "Before you burn off your own foot. Or damage the ship." But he made no motion towards the switch.

"This is not a joke," I said. "I'll kill you. Really. Now move away from the board."

At that moment the ship gave a particularly violent lurch. Webb looked at me and made his decision and jumped for the switch. He was a brave man, there is no question about that. I shot him, a very neat shot, a small pinhole almost exactly between his eyes. He looked rather astonished as he fell.

I motioned to Green. "Quickly," I said. "Fire the lasers. Over their heads."

The lasers flickered out, burning the ground beyond the natives, reddening the sky. It was enough. They broke and ran. The ship did not fall.

I looked around the room. Everyone looked back at me. I realized that someone would have to give some direction. I walked over to Webb's corpse and gripped it underneath the arms. I started to drag him out of there. He was too heavy to carry comfortably.

I motioned to Bachman. "Take his legs," I said.

She seemed to smile. "Are we going to eat him?" she asked.

The remark did not amuse me.

Together we carried him along the corridors and finally to the exit hatch, from which I pushed him out on to the plain. We returned to the control room.

"All right," I said to Green, "let's go home."

We took off. Webb's body, presumably, was consumed in the flames.

And that is how it happened. In two hours we will enter null space. In one hundred and five days we will be back on Earth. There will be a reckoning then. And there will be one now.

"In the beginning," I said, as I ejected Webb's body out on to that icy, burning plain, "Was the deed."

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To those of you have signed on recently, this is to introduce L. Sprague de Camp's Willy Newbury, an unassuming middle-aged banker and something of an expert on the supernatural. Willy's bizarre adventures have been appearing here for the last couple of years, most recently "United Imp," December 1977. We are pleased to present a new tale in the popular series.

The Huns

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

On one of our vacations at Lake Algonquin, my Aunt Frances said: "Willy, Phyllis wants you to come over to Panther Falls to help her sell Wilderfarm."

"Oh?" I said. "I didn't know Aunt Phyllis was planning to sell."

"Well, she is. Will you go?"

"Look, Aunt Frances, I'm a banker, not a real-estate broker; and I don't practice in New York State anyway —"

"You still know more about mortgages and things than poor Phyllis ever will."

"Why is she selling?"

"She says it's too much place to keep up by herself, now that her children have moved away. Says she's too old to manage. The fact is, she's just too fat. If she'd control her appetite... Besides, she said something about peculiar things happening lately."

"Eh? What? If she's got spooks, let her get an exorcist. I've bumped into enough of that stuff to last me —"

"I didn't say spooks, Willy."

"Then what?"

"Some sort of terror gang, I take it."

"That's a job for the troopers."

Frances Colton sighed. "Willy, you are deliberately being evasive. I'm not asking you to cast out devils or fight a gang of juvenile delinquents. I'm only asking you to give poor Phyllis some advice on selling the place. Some developer wants to take it over. Will you go?"

I sighed in turn. "I was going to take Stevie trolling for bass tomorrow."

"If the weather's good, take him; but the first rainy day, you can go over to the Falls. It's only an hour."

Two days later, leaving Denise to cope with our three restless adolescents, I drove to Gahato. I stopped at Bugby's Garage for gas

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and an oil change. While this was being done, I stood in the drizzle in my slicker, watching the locals walk past. I said howdy to a few whom I knew.

Then I sighted Virgil Hathaway, with his hair in two long black braids. Virgil has been friendly ever since I arranged a small bank loan for him when he was hard up in the fifties. Nowadays, with all the publicity about the poor Indian, Virgil does all right; but he still remembers a favor.

"Hello, Virgil," I said. "How's Chief Soaring Turtle these days?"

Hathaway's copper-hued visage wrinkled into a grin. "Can't rightly complain, leastaways not as far as the old lady and me be concerned."

"Then what?"

He shrugged. "Oh, I dunno. The kids are grown up, and they've quit the Indian business."

"You mean they're assimilating?"

"Ayuh. The girl's working for the telephone company, and Calvin's got a job as an engineer. Makes more money in a week than I ever did in a month, selling my toy canoes and moccasins and things. Worst of it is, he's planning to marry some white girl."

"Ts, ts, Virgil; don't tell me you've got racial prejudices!"

"Yep, I guess I do. At this rate, there wunt be no more Indians left at all. All mixed into the mass."

"Well, you Penobscots acquired a good deal of white blood over the centuries."

Hathaway grinned. "Sure. In the old days, when we entertained a visiting white man, we sure *entertained* him. If he left a few half-breeds behind, that was more warriors for the tribe. But that's all over and done with. How be you?"

I brought Hathaway up to date on the Newbury family, adding: "I'm on my way to Panther Falls to help my aunt on a real-estate deal. Seems she's in trouble with some local group."

"Ayuh? What kind of trouble?"

"I don't know. Some sort of terror, I hear."

"Jeepers! What you need, Willy, is some good old Indian medicine man to put a hex on 'em. Like that guy on the Tonawanda Reservation, who came through here nineteen years ago. He'd fix your terrorists."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll bear it in mind."

Wilderfarm, which Phyllis Wilder was planning to sell, adjoined another tract in the patrimony of my great-grandfather. This other lot contained Floreando, the Victorian-rustic mansion that Abraham Newbury built in the eighties. One passed this house on the way to the Farm. After my great-aunt and great-uncle died,

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none of their heirs wanted the place, which needed a platoon of servitors to make it livable. Where, nowadays, would anyone but an oil billionaire retain a platoon of servitors?

First came a grand share-out of movables. A swarm of Abraham Newbury's descendants carried off furniture, pictures, chinaware, and so on in cars, trucks, and station wagons. Then, just before the War, the property was sold. It passed through several hands; but I had not kept up with its vicissitudes.

With a sudden attack of nostalgia, I turned in between the two big stone pillars that flanked the graveled driveway. I wanted one more look, to revive my childhood memories of rollicking parties, with swarms of cousins riding, swimming, picnicking, and horsing around. My cousin Hereward — the one who became a playwright — used to put us through abridgments of Shakespeare's plays; I once played Hamlet's father's ghost.

The big old three-story stone house was still there. So was the iron deer on the lawn. A porch ran three-quarters of the way around the building, ending on one side in a shingled porte-cochère. An upstairs porch, surmounted by a conical roof like those on castle towers, jutted out from the second story. If Floreando did not have a resident ghost, it ought to have had.

I took the branch of the driveway leading back to the highway, instead of continuing on the loop, which went around the house and under the porte-cochère. I stopped the car and sat, remembering.

The fountain on the spacious lawn played no more. The grass was so long that it needed a scythe or a reaper instead of a mower. Something else, too, had changed.

On the strip of lawn, between the porte-cochère and the trees, stood half a dozen shiny motorcycles in a row. These were no little one-lung gas-savers, but big, heavy, two- and four-cylinder road bikes.

"You looking for somebody, mister?" said a voice.

A burly fellow in his twenties slouched up to my car. He put one hand on the roof and leaned forward, thrusting his face within a foot of mine. He had a mane of blond hair, hanging over his shoulders, chest, and back, and a full blond beard. He wore a suit of blue denim, with the pants tucked into heavy boots. These boots had half a dozen straps and buckles down the side, metal toes, and curved metal shin plates, rather like an ancient warrior's greaves.

"No," I said. "I just drove in to take a look. I used to play here when I was a kid."

"Oh," he said.

When the young man continued to stand beside the car, blocking

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my view to the right, I glanced the opposite way. The land across the Black River still rose, dim in the drizzle, in green tiers towards Tug Hill.

"Seen all you want to, mister?" the young man said at last.

"I think so," I said.

Having no intention of getting into a fight, I forbore to remark on his opacity. This youth was half my age and at least as big as I — and I am above average. He looked quite able to take a middle-aged banker apart.

"Who owns the place now?" I asked.

"The — the Lewis County Motorcycle Association."

"Oh." When the young man still stood, with beady blue eyes boring into me from under shaggy blond brows, I started up and drove back to the highway.

At the Farm, on the porch of the old white clapboard house, my aunt welcomed me with her usual extravagance. She hugged me to what they used to call her ample bosom. I said:

"Aunt Phyllis, you didn't use to have lightning rods on the Farm, did you?"

"No, but so many places have been struck lately that I thought it wise."

"That's funny. I haven't heard of a change in the local climate."

"Neither have I," she wheezed. "I can't quote figures, but there have been a strange lot of local strikes. That's what set the Reverend Grier's house on fire. Some superstitious people think it was meant that way."

"How do you mean? Unless it's one of those climate-control experiments, I hadn't heard that anybody could govern the direction of lightning."

She shrugged, making her fat quiver. "I shouldn't say anything about anybody...."

She broke off, listening. A snorelike, sawmillish noise was heard from the west. We looked in that direction, where the sun had begun to break through the rain clouds. A parade of motorcycle riders went past on the highway. A ray of the afternoon sun sparkled on their handlebars.

Aunt Phyllis jerked a thumb. "Especially them."

"The Lewis County Motorcycle Association?"

"Or the Huns, as they call themselves."

"What *is* all this? Are they staging a reign of terror?"

Aunt Phyllis made fluttery motions. "I oughtn't to talk about them — but so many queer things — you know, they say they make members of the gang do things that would turn a normal person's stomach, to show their manhood. And

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now, when somebody gets in their bad graces, his house gets hit by lightning or something. I called up the troopers to complain about one of their wild parties — they bring in their girls, and you can hear them clear to Boonville — so I got hit. It only knocked off a couple of shingles, praise be, but then I had the lightning rods put up. So now they just wheel in and out of the driveway, throwing beer cans and shouting vulgar things at me."

"Why doesn't somebody lower the boom on them?"

"It's hard to prove anything, because they all look alike in those helmets. Besides, their head man, young Nick, is the son of Jack Nicholson, the richest man in the county. Jack is getting a little senile now; but he's still a power in local politics, so nobody dares to touch his son. Jack's money bought Floreando."

"Trouble is," I said, "you've got a one-party system here. By the way, I drove in to Floreando to look it over."

"Run down, isn't it? But we have to expect it. Our family has come down in the world since Abraham's day. Only you, Willy, had the sense to get where the real money is, praise be."

"More by accident than design. I only hope I'm as able a banker as I might have been as an engineer." I told her about the Wagnerian character in blue denim.

"That would be Truman Vogel, Marshall Nicholson's second in command. Watch out for him. He kicked Bob Hawley with those iron boots and sent him to the hospital. They burned a cross on Doctor Rosen's lawn. They're talking about making this a white man's country."

I sighed. "The nuttier the program, the more nuts you'll find to join it. How about that sale of yours?"

I briefed Phyllis Wilder on the intricacies of mortgages, settlements, titles, agents, and lawyers. At the end, I promised to come back three or four days later, when the developer would have made a firm offer. Then I set out for Lake Algonquin, hoping to reach the Colton camp for dinner.

Passing through Panther Falls, I spied a name plate, saying "Isaiah Rosen, M.D.," on a lawn. I glanced at my clock and drew up.

I had known Rosen slightly before the War, when I was an undergraduate and he a young physician who had taken over old Doc Prescott's practice. I remembered mentioning Rosen at one of the gatherings of cousins. My cousin Winthrop Colton — the one who was killed in the War — looked down his nose and said, with a kind of sniff: "Oh. You mean the Jew."

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Such attitudes were common upstate in those days. Happily, things have changed, although you can still find pockets of such views among the old timers.

Now a balding Rosen greeted me. "I remember you, Mr. Newbury. What can I do for you?"

"Not a medical problem," I said. "I've been seeing my aunt, Mrs. Wilder."

Rosen shook his head. "I keep telling her to cut back on the carbohydrates."

I told Rosen about the Huns. "I hear you've had a brush with them, too?"

Rosen stared. "You might say so. The whole thing has an unpleasantly familiar sound. Not that I was in Europe during the Holocaust — I was right here, building up a practice — but naturally I take an interest in such things. This campaign has already cut into my practice."

"What did you do to antagonize them?"

He shrugged. "With my background, I didn't need to do anything. When I heard that Marshall Nicholson was turning the motorcycle club into some kind of neopagan cult, complete with blood sacrifices, I told Jack Nicholson that his son needed psychiatric care. Old Jack scoffed, saying Nick had a right to freedom of religion like everyone else. Presumably the story got back, and that's what touched it off."

"The First Amendment doesn't let anyone sacrifice unbelievers to Mumbo Jumbo — at least, not unless the Supreme Court gets even goofier. What about these alleged supernatural feats? The lightning business."

Rosen snorted. "The usual moonshine. When lightning hits twice within a radius of half a mile, some folks suspect that God or a local witch has it in for someone in the target area. As a man of scientific training, I take no stock in such talk."

"I hope you're right," I said, "but I've had a scientific training, too, and I've seen enough oddities to be skeptical even of my own skepticism."

The next time I went to visit Aunt Phyllis, I drove down the line to Gahato. I stopped at Virgil Hathaway's curio shop, the sign before which read:

CHIEF SOARING TURTLE
INDIAN BEAD WORK —
POTTERY

Hathaway was selling a customer a Navaho blanket made in Connecticut. When he had finished, I said:

"Virgil, those eyeglasses somehow don't fit the Amerind decor."

"I got to be able to read my own price tags," he said. "Anyway, it

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dunt matter nowadays. When I started the business, I used to play up to the kids, talking funny English and saying *ugh* and *how*. But kids are smarter'n they was."

"You still have your braids."

"Ayuh, but that's what - you - call-it functional. Saves me three or four bucks a month getting haircuts. What can I do for you?"

"You told me about some medicine man out at Tonawanda. How could I get in touch with him?"

"You mean Charlie Catfish. Ain't seen Charlie in two-three year, but we send Christmas cards." Hathaway consulted an address book and gave me a telephone number.

At the farm, Phyllis Wilder threw herself upon me, nearly knocking me flat. "Oh, Willy! Do you know what those wretched young thugs have done?"

"What now, Aunt Phyllis?" said I, staggering back in her embrace.

"They spoiled the deal with Mr. Fife, at least for now." Fife was the developer. "He came over with his surveyor to look the place over. While he was here, the Huns rode up the driveway on their motorcycles and circled the house yelling, like a tribe of Indians riding around a water hole. It scared Mr. Fife so he went away, saying he couldn't consider buying the place while the neighborhood was so disturbed."

"Did you call the troopers?"

"Yes, but by the time they got here the Huns were gone. Trooper Talbot told me afterwards they went to Floreando and talked to the Huns, but they just denied everything. I'd have to file a formal complaint, and I'm afraid of what they'd do. They'd be out on bail, delaying the case for months or years.... You'll stay the night, won't you, Willy? I'm so scared."

"Sure, I'll stay. Speaking of Indians, there's one I want to call. He might be able to help."

"An Indian? How do you mean? To get up a war party, the way they did two hundred years ago — but no, Willy, you wouldn't do anything so silly. You were always the sensible one, praise be. What, then?"

"You'll see when he gets here" — if he does. I thought — "no, wait. I'll meet him in the village. If I like his looks, could you put him up here along with me?"

"I guess so. At my age, nobody'll suspect me of entertaining a redskin lover." She gave a girlish giggle.

I called the number that Hathaway had given me and asked for Charles H. Catfish. When a man answered, I gave Hathaway's name and sketched my aunt's difficulties. I ended:

"Hathaway suggested that you

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might be able to help out, by means of your — uh — your special powers."

"Mought," said Catfish, "if it was made worth my while. Means I got to take time off from my job."

"What do you do, Mr. Catfish?"

"I sell Chevrolets in Kenmore. What was you thinking of paying?"

After consultation with Phyllis Wilder, I went back to the telephone and agreed with Catfish on a daily retainer. He promised to meet me in Panther Falls the next day.

"What time?" I asked.

"How about lunch time?"

"You'd have to get up pretty early. It's a four or five-hour drive, even with the Thruway."

The voice chuckled. "I know. Getting up early don't bother me none. It's an old Indian habit."

That night nobody came near Wilderfarm. There were, however, ominous sounds from the direction of Floreando: drumming and chanting. I suppose it was cowardly of me not to have gotten dressed and gone skulking over there to see what the Huns were up to.

Charles H. Catfish kept me waiting in Panther Falls for over an hour. I do not want to generalize, but I fear that punctuality is not an outstanding American Indian virtue. At last a new, shiny Chevrolet sedan drove up.

My medicine man was a roly-poly fellow, about my age, in a handsome sports jacket, a necktie bearing Amerind motifs, and big black horn-rims. He wore his stiff black hair in a crew-cut brush. One had to look twice at his copper complexion and Mongoloid features to realize that he was an Indian and not just a middle-aged, sun-tanned fat man.

"Hello, Mr. Newbury," he said. "What's your problem? When the palefaces get stuck, they come around to sons of bitches like me for help."

Over lunch at the Panther Falls Diner, I told Catfish about my aunt's troubles.

"Have to think," he said. "Maybe old Eitsinoha can help us out. She ain't what she used to be, on account of having so few followers; but still, a great spirit is a great spirit."

Catfish proved a garrulous joker and storyteller, although my aunts would not have approved of many of his jokes.

"A few years ago," he said, "a damn funny thing happened to me. There was an assembly of professors from all over the world, at Ithaca — some learned society. Well, the guys at Cornell wanted to show these frogs and squareheads and dagoes some Indian stuff. Now, I got friends who try to keep up the old dances and cere-

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monies, and sometimes we put 'em on for pay. So I says, what the hell.

"I got Brant Johnson and Joe Ganogeh, and Joe's two boys, and we went to Ithaca with our feathers and junk. Of course, I know no real old-time Iroquois ever wore a Plains Indian war bonnet. Joe's older boy was the only one with anything like a proper Seneca hair crest and leggings. But these foreigners would never know the difference.

"So we did the corn dance and the war dance and the rest, beside Lake Cayuga, where all these wise guys were having a picnic. They gave us a good hand — all but one frog, a Catholic priest in a long gown and a berry hat. He stood with his back to us.

"When somebody asked why he wasn't watching, he said: *'Je démontre contre les injustices infligeés sur les peaux-rouges!'* You know French? This guy didn't know I knew it, on account of I've worked in Quebec. Then one of the Russkies snarled at him: *'Oui, et maintenant par les francais dans l'Algérie!'* This was when the Algerians were giving the French such a hard time that the frogs pulled out a little later.

"It was nice to have somebody sympathize with the injustices inflicted on the redskins; but I'd rather he'd watched us dancing and trying to earn an honest dollar."

We left the diner and stood on the sidewalk while Catfish finished one of his stories. As he spoke, I saw two men marching in step towards us. One was the big, burly youth with long blond hair, with whom I had spoken the time I drove in to Floreando.

The other, also young, was smaller and slighter — about average in size — and clean-shaven. Instead of blue denim, he wore whipcord riding breeches and real riding boots. I wear similar breeches and boots when I ride a horse; but I am of the older generation. Among young riders today, one doesn't often see such an outfit except on formal occasions, like a horse show. Otherwise it is blue jeans, often with high-heeled cowboy boots.

As the pair approached, I saw them check their stride. While they hesitated, the Siegfried type in blue denim said something to the other. Then they walked straight towards us. The smaller, he of the peg-topped breeches, looked me in the eye and said:

"Excuse me, but aren't you Mrs. Wilder's nephew, Wilson Newbury?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Marshall Nicholson. I'm pleased to know people of the old families." He stuck out a hand, which I shook without enthusiasm. "And — uh —" He looked a question at Catfish, who said:

"Charlie Catfish."

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"Glad to meet you, Mr. Catfish. This is Truman Vogel." Nicholson looked sharply at Catfish. "Indian?"

"Yes, sir. Seneca."

"Mr. Newbury," said Nicholson, "Truman told me how you dropped in on us last week. I'm sorry I wasn't there to meet you. I also understand you've been hearing things about our little club."

"Well?"

"People will insist on misunderstanding us, you know. They tell all sorts of silly stories, just because we like to ride the hogs. I thought you might drop over to Floreando to talk it over. That's kind of an ancestral home of yours, isn't it? You, too, Mr. Catfish, if you'd like to come."

The young man had a good deal of charm, although experience had made me wary of charmers. Catfish and I exchanged looks.

"Please!" said Nicholson. "We're really harmless."

"Okay," I said. "When?"

"Right now, if you've got nothing else on."

Catfish and I formed a motorcade behind the two motorcycles. We wheeled into the driveway between the pillars and up to the porte-cochère. This time, no other motorcycles were parked beside the building.

The huge living room had changed since my boyhood. The floor was bare and much scratched. Gone were the ancestral pictures of men in wreath beards and high collars and women in poke bonnets. The bookshelves were empty save a for a few sets of collected sermons, which none of Abraham's descendants had wanted. The only other reading matter in sight consisted of piles of motorcycle magazines and comic books.

One window had been broken and crudely patched with a sheet of plastic. The few pieces of furniture looked beat-up; that may have been a case of all the better pieces' being taken away by the heirs.

One thing had been added. The living room had a huge fireplace, and over it ran a long stone mantel. On this shelf stood a score of helmets, of the sort worn in the Ring operas. The one in the center had a pair of metal wings, while all the others had horns. I suppose they were made of *papier-mâché* and covered with metal foil, but I had no chance to examine them closely.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said Nicholson. "Can we get you a beer?"

"Thanks," I said. As Vogel went out, Nicholson explained:

"You see, Willy — mind if I call you Willy? — this isn't just one more hell-raising gang of young punks, you know. They were that when I took 'em over, but now I've given them a direction in life."

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"What direction?"

"Nothing less than national regeneration — the restoration of the American spirit, making this a country fit for heroes. But you can't build a sound house of rotten wood, you know. That means we've got to cull out the rotten material."

Vogel returned with three cans of beer. He served one each to Catfish and me and took the third himself. I asked Nicholson: "Aren't you having any?"

"No. I don't drink." The young man gave a nervous little laugh. "You might call me a kind of health nut. But to get back: You've got to have sound material to build a sound structure, you know. This applies to human institutions just as much as it does to houses and bridges. You've got to cull out the unsound."

"Who are the sound and who the unsound, then?"

"Oh, come off it, Willy! As a member of an old Anglo-Saxon family, you ought to know. The sound are the old original Nordic Aryan stock, which came over from the British Isles and other parts of northern Europe and made this country what it is — or at least, what it was before we let in hordes of biologically inferior niggers and kikes and spicks."

When I sat silently, he continued: "The scientific evidence is overwhelming, only it's been smudged and covered up and lied about by the Marxists. But I won't go into all the angles yet. Most people have been so brain-washed by liberal propaganda that they think you're a nut if you tell them a few plain facts, you know. If I can continue this discussion later, I'll prove my points." He turned to Catfish. "Charlie, I hear you've got the special powers belonging to some Indians. Is that right?"

Evidently, someone had already spread the word of my hiring an aboriginal shaman. How the news got out I do not know. Perhaps my garrulous aunt had told one of her friends over the telephone while I was out of the house. Knowing small towns, I should not have been surprised.

Catfish's round red face remained blank. He said:

"I learned a few old-time prayers and ceremonies when I was young, yes."

"We can use a man like you in our movement. Your people have valuable qualities."

"I'm not exactly a Nordic Aryan, Mr. Nicholson," said Catfish.

"Don't worry about that. When we take over, we'll make the Indians honorary Aryans."

I spoke up: "Nick, how do you expect to make friends and influence people by letting your gang terrorize my old aunt?"

"Why, we never terrorize any-

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body! We believe in being kind to old ladies, especially old ladies of sound Anglo-Saxon stock. But —" He hesitated. "— you know, when I took the club over, they were just like any other motorcycle gang. You've got to work with the material you have. You can't expect everybody to be a — a spotless Puritan and a perfect gentleman, just as you can't chop down a tree with a razor blade. I've brought 'em a long way, but they still get a little rowdy at times. That'll pass. If the boys knew you were among our supporters, I'm sure Mrs. Wilder wouldn't have any more trouble. Now, can we count on your help, you two?"

"I'd have to think it over," I said, and Catfish mumbled something to the same effect.

I rose without awaiting further argument and said: "It's been very interesting, Nick. Maybe we can look in on you again." When Nicholson opened his mouth as if to protest, I pointed to the mantelpiece, saying: "Those Viking helmets made me wonder. If you're so hot on the Nordic type, why do you call yourselves Huns? According to history, the Huns were Mongolians — little square, slant-eyed men in fur caps, who came galloping out of the Gobi Desert on shaggy ponies. Not at all Nordic."

"Oh, that," said Nicholson. "The club called themselves Huns before I became leader. 'The Goths' would have been a better name, but I haven't yet been able to sell them on it. I will eventually. I'll also make 'em switch from Japanese bikes to Harley-Davidsons and Husqvarnas. If they're going to buy imports, at least they can import them from a Nordic country."

"Thanks for the beer," I said, and went.

We left Nicholson and Vogel standing on the porch and staring after us. I led Catfish back to the highway and thence to the Farm. When we had parked and gotten out, Catfish said:

"Jeepers! Felt like I'd put my hand into a hole and found it full of rattlers. You didn't kid 'em with your talk of thinking it over. They know you've got your tomahawk out for them. And don't think they meant that crap about the noble red man, either. If I'm any kind of medicine man, they'll try to get in the first lick first."

"I suppose so," I said. "Here comes my aunt. Aunt Phyllis, this is Charles H. Catfish; Charlie, this is Mrs. Wilder."

Catfish, who had been looking solemn even for an Indian, grinned. "Delighted, ma'am. I was just telling your nephew that's the way I thought a woman ought to be built. If I didn't have a wife and five kids to support already, I'd take a shine to you myself."

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Giggling, Phyllis Wilder led us into the house. Here, things were in disorder. Piles of old clothes and children's discarded playthings littered the rooms. I asked:

"Are you packing up already, Aunt Phyllis, before the place is sold?"

"No, Willy. But I am clearing out some of the junk collected by four generations. Here's one item." From a pile, she picked up a brown canvas hunting jacket with big pockets. "This belonged to Peter." (Peter Wilder was her late husband.) "Would you like it?"

I took off my own coat and tried on the jacket. "It fits fine," I said. "Thanks; this'll be useful." I told her about our visit to Floreando.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "They'll be up to some devilment. Can you help us, Mr. Catfish?'

"I can try," said Catfish. "Have you got a room where I can be let alone for the rest of the afternoon?"

"Sure. Right at the head of the stairs."

I helped Catfish to carry in three large suitcases. He shut himself in the room. Soon there came the tapping of a little drum and vocal noises, I suppose a chant in Seneca.

Aunt Phyllis and I sat downstairs, traded family gossip, and talked about the prospective sale of the Farm. The sun was low when Charles Catfish appeared at the head of the stairs. He came down slowly, and his voice sounded weak and husky. There was nothing of the jolly joker about him now.

"I've been in the spirit world," he said. "Eitsinoha will do what she can. She says the Huns got some spirit from across the water. Some name like 'Dawner.' That mean anything to you?"

I thought. "Of course! She must mean Donner or Donar, the old Germanic thunder god. The Scandinavians called him Thor, but Wagner used the German form in *Das Rheingold*. What can your — uh — what's-her-name do for us?"

"Don't expect too much. The powers of spirits are limited, even big-league spirits like these. They can tell you things in dreams and trances; they can do things to the weather; they can fix cards and dice. But it's no use asking Eitsinoha to pick up young Nicholson and dunk him in the Black River. Oh, before I forget!"

Catfish brought out a flat pint whiskey bottle and set it down, saying: "I found this empty in one of them piles of stuff, Mrs. Wilder. Hope you don't mind me using it. Willy, what's in that there bottle looks and tastes like ordinary water; but, if you can get Nick to drink it, it'll change his attitude for sure."

I put the bottle in one of the pockets of the hunting coat. "How

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am I supposed to do that?"

"I dunno. You'll have to figure something out. Do I smell something cooking, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Phyllis Wilder. "Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes, praise be. Willy, you can be bartender. The stuff's in the cupboard to the left of the stove. Well, Mr. Catfish, what'll we do if — if they raid us again?"

"Do you keep a gun, Aunt Phyllis?" I asked.

"I have a little twenty-two, for woodchucks in my garden."

"Better think twice about using a gun," said Catfish. "The way they got the laws fixed in New York State now, if you find a burglar climbing out the window of your house with his loot, you dassen't shoot him. If you do, they'll put you in jail for using 'excessive force.' Then if he dies, you'll take the rap for manslaughter. If he lives, he'll sue you for a million bucks and prob'ly get a judgment. We Indians were more practical. When we found some guy stealing our stuff, we killed him, and that was that."

I had gone to my room around eleven and was just beginning to undress when all hell broke loose. The roar of motorcycles around the house was mingled with yells, whoops, and the crash of breaking glass.

I buttoned up and raced downstairs. Phyllis Wilder and Charlie Catfish were almost as quick.

"Aunt Phyllis, telephone the troopers!" I said.

Although fluttering and wheezing, she picked up the telephone. After a few seconds, she said: "Oh, dear me, it's dead! They must have cut the wires."

"Let me try," I said. She had been right.

Catfish said: "Tell me where the nearest barracks is. I'll drive over and get 'em, while you take care of Mrs. Wilder."

Phyllis Wilder gave directions, while the uproar outside continued. A bottle crashed through the window and landed at my feet.

Catfish ducked out into the car port but was back in a few minutes. "She's dead, too. Must have tore out the wires or pulled the distributor head. Suppose you try yours, Willy."

I did, with the same results. While I was explaining my failure, a stone whizzed through one of the windows and hit me on the forehead. I staggered and almost went down.

I am usually — if I say so myself — a pretty even-tempered, self-controlled man. In my business, one has to be. About once a year, however, the pressure builds up and I blow my top.

In the corner of the living room was a pile of disused toys, including

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a junior-sized baseball bat. As I recovered my balance, my eye fell upon that bat. In two steps I grabbed it up. Then I ran out the front door.

"Willy!" wailed Aunt Phyllis. "Come back! You'll be killed!"

At that moment, if I had been told that I faced execution by firing squad for use of excessive force, I would not have cared. I was an idiot, of course, but this is what happened.

When the first motorcyclist loomed out of the dark, I took him across the front of the helmet with the bat. I heard the plastic crunch, and the cyclist was flipped backwards out of his saddle. The motorcycle disappeared riderless into the dark.

Then they were all around me, their headlight beams thrusting like lances. The Huns could not all get at me at once because they were encumbered by their vehicles. I jumped about like a matador dodging bulls and whacked away. Some of the yells implied that I had gotten home. Then something hit me over the ear....

I awoke on the floor of the living room at Floreando. For a few seconds, I knew not where I was. I had an atavistic suspicion that I was in Hell; then I saw that the devils were merely the Huns in their horned helmets. My head throbbed like a forging hammer.

"Ah," said Nicholson's voice. "He's coming to."

I turned my head, wincing, and saw that Nicholson was wearing the winged helmet.

"Just what Donar ordered," continued Nick. "Hey, grab him!"

I had started to sit up. Four of them pounced upon me, hauled me to a chair, and sat me in it. They tied my wrists to the chair behind my back and my ankles to the front legs.

Now that my vision had cleared and my memory had sorted itself out, I saw that I had indeed done some execution among the Huns. One had his arm in a sling. Another had a bandage around his head under the helmet. A third was trying to staunch a flow of blood from a broken nose.

Many of them wore plastic protectors, like those of football players, on shoulders, chests, and knees. Together with the operatic helmets and the massive boots, the effect was startlingly medieval.

"Get the sacrifice ready, Truman," said Nicholson. "We'll use that old stump in the woodshed. Chuck, stoke up the furnace. Remember, we've got to burn up every last piece of bone or tooth. Carry him out, you guys."

The chair was hoisted and borne through the long hall to the kitchen and out the back door.

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Floreando had a huge woodshed, dating from the days when firewood was the only source of heat. Some ancestor had put in steam heat around 1900, but the woodshed still maintained a supply of wood for the fireplaces. Even in midsummer, the nights there get pretty cool.

A single light bulb illumined the area. The "stump" of which Nicholson had spoken was a cylindrical piece of tree trunk, about thirty inches high and the same in diameter. One of the Huns was whetting a double-bitted lumberman's ax.

"Now," said Nicholson, "you know the invocation to Donar. Gary, you keep hold of Newbury. He might try to wriggle away, tied up as he is, while we're looking elsewhere. Now, are you all ready with the responses? Great Donar, lord of lightning —"

Overhead, lightning flashed and distant thunder rumbled.

"Hey, leader!" said a Hun. "He's got something in his pocket."

"Search him," said Nicholson.

From Uncle Peter's hunting coat, the speaker brought out the pint bottle. He chuckled: "Why, the old rumdum!"

"Throw it away," said Nicholson.

"No, Nick, wait!" said Truman Vogel. "No use wasting good booze." He unscrewed the cap and sniffed. Then he wet a finger and tasted. "Oh, shit! Seems to be plain water. Now what would he carry a bottle of water around for? It's not like he was out hunting or fishing."

The prospect of having one's head chopped off, and morever by an amateur executioner who would probably make a messy job of it, is a wonderful stimulant to thinking. "Hey!" I yelled, although I suspect it came out as a croak. "Give me that!" The effort made my head throb.

"Won't do you no good," said Vogel. "What is this stuff, anyway?"

"I can't tell you. Catfish swore me to secrecy."

"Oh, yeah? We'll see about that. Gary, just tighten those ropes a little."

Gary obeyed. I put on an act — and not entirely an act — of a man bravely resisting torture and then succumbing to pain.

"Okay, I'll tell!" I gasped. "It's the magical Iroquois water. Their medicine men make it, to give their warriors the strength to overcome all their enemies. When they get enough, they hope to drive all the whites into the ocean."

"Oh," said Nicholson. "Well, maybe it'll work for us. I've got enemies to overcome, too. Let's see it."

He took the bottle from Vogel, sniffed, and tasted. "Seems harmless."

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"Don't!" I cried. "You don't know what it'll do to you!"

"Fuck you, buster," said Nicholson. "You won't be here to worry about that, you know." He tilted up the bottle with a gurgling sound.

"Seems like good, clean water," he said. "Okay, on with the ceremony."

"And off with his head," said Vogel. A titter ran through the Huns. "Stan, you and Mike haul Newbury over to the stump."

"You want we should untie him?" said a Hun.

"God, no! He's no pushover, even if he is a gray-haired old geezer. Take the chair and all and put him so his neck is face-down on the stump — uh — well, you know what I mean."

I was dragged, still bound, to the stump and laid across it. By twisting my neck, I could still see what was going on. The Hun with the ax stood up and spat on his hands.

"Now repeat after me," said Nicholson: "Great Donar, lord of the lightning —"

"*Great Donar, lord of the lightning* —" said the other Huns.

"And god of the immortal, indomitable Nordic Aryan race —"

"*And god of the immortal, indomitable Nordic Aryan race* —"

"We sacrifice a man unto thee —"

"*We sacrifice a man unto* —"

There was a violet flash in the clouds overhead, and thunder rumbled.

"In return, we ask that thou smiteth our enemies with thy lightnings —" Nicholson's knowledge of Jacobean English grammar was weak. The Huns responded as usual.

"Beginning with Phyllis Wilder, Isaiah Rose, and Paul Grier —

"And that thou giveth us a sign —"

Again a flash and a rumble, but more faintly.

"Louder, we pray, great Donar!"

This time, the thunder was barely audible. Nicholson said: "He's not in a good mood tonight."

"Let's give Newbury the business, quick," said Vogel. "It's Thursday, and we can't wait a week for *his* day to come around again."

"Ready with that ax, Frank!" said Vogel. "Wait till I give the signal. But — that's funny. *Was war ich* — what was I — going to say? I — ah — *ah* —" He stared about in a puzzled way. "*Was für ein Unsinn* —" He gasped and clutched at his throat.

"You been poisoned, Nick?" asked Vogel. The other Huns murmured excitedly.

Recovering himself, Nicholson shouted, gesticulating fiercely: "*Wir wollen wiederherstellen die Einheit des Geistes und des Willens*

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der deutschen Nation! Die Rasse liegt nicht in der Sprache, soondern im Blute!"

The Huns looked bewilderedly at one another. One said: "Hey, Truman, is he off his nut?"

"God, I dunno," said Vogel. "We can't take him to that Jew doctor —"

A Hun ran around the corner of the woodshed into the light. "The fuzz!" he shouted. "Split, you guys!"

With muffled exclamations, the Huns scurried away. I have never seen human beings scatter so quickly. There was a sudden glare of motorcycle headlights and the roar of motors. Away went the Huns, wheeling over lawns and through woods, as two state police cars turned into the driveway. By the time four troopers appeared around the corner of the woodshed, pistols at ready, the only persons present were myself, still tied to that chair, and Marshall Nicholson. The gang leader held his right upper arm out stiffly while the forearm pumped up and down with a clockworky motion, as if he were pounding an invisible desk with his fist as he ranted:

"...Wer ein folk retten will, kann nur heroisch denken! Der heroische Gedanke aber muss stehts bereits sein, auf die Zustimmung der Gegenwart Verzicht zu leisten, wenn die Wahrhaftigkeit und die Wahrheit es erfordert!"

"We left the house after they carried you off," said Charlie Catfish, "and hiked along the road till we found a place to phone."

"Oh, my poor feet!" moaned Phyllis Wilder.

We stood in Doctor Rosen's crowded waiting room, with two troopers holding the handcuffed Marshall Nicholson. Jack Nicholson sat with his face in his hands. Young Nick was still orating in German. Questions in English brought no response.

Rosen finished his examination, or as much of it as he could do with an obstreperous patient. He said:

"Mr. Newbury, do you speak German?"

"A little. I got fairly fluent in Germany after the War, but I've forgotten most of it."

"I read it, but I don't speak it worth a damn. Ask him when he was born."

"Wann waren Sie geboren?" I said to Nick.

He paused in his harangue. *"Warum?"*

"Tut nichts! Sagen Sie mir."

"Der zwanzigst April, achtzehnhundert neunundachtzig."

"April twentieth, eighteen eighty-nine," I told Rosen.

One trooper murmured: "That'd make him older than his father."

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Rosen said: "Mr. Nicholson, what was your son's birth date?"

Old Nicholson looked up. "April thirtieth, nineteen forty-five."

"Has he ever studied German?"

"Not that I know of. He never finished High."

Rosen stood for a minute in thought. "You'll have to commit him, Mr. Nicholson," he said. "I don't know any way around it. I'll get out the papers. There's a good place in Utica...."

This happened before that court decision, that a loony must be allowed to run loose until he proves he is dangerous by killing somebody. After the troopers and the Nicholsons had gone, I asked Rosen:

"Doc, what was all that about birth dates?"

"Mr. Newbury, I've told you I don't believe for a second in supernatural stuff. But it is a strange coincidence that Adolf Hitler was born April 20, 1889; and that he killed himself in Berlin on the very day Marshall Nicholson was born. Moreover, I've read Hitler's speeches in the original."

"You have? That seems strange."

"Not at all. When you know somebody is out to kill you, it's only sensible to learn all you can about him, so you can protect yourself. The German that Nick was spouting seemed to be nothing but excerpts from Hitler's speeches. I'd have to check — I can't remember them word for word — but it certainly sounded familiar. Mr. Catfish, what was in that water Mr. Newbury got Nick to drink?"

"Just tap water," said Catfish, "but I prayed to Eitsinoha to give it the power to take away a man's memory." To me he added: "Donar gave her a tussle, but every spirit's strongest on its home ground."

"You mean," I said, "that Nick is a reincarnation of Adolf Hitler? I can see how that might work. If you wiped out his memory of this life, that would leave him the memory of his previous life. So he'd think he was still Hitler and be very much confused. One moment he's in the bunker, getting ready to shoot himself; the next, he's in a woodshed in upstate New York —"

"Please, please!" said Rosen. "I've told you, I don't believe in that nonsense. My business is curing folks of what ails them, and for that I need a strictly scientific outlook. But I thought it might interest you. Do you need a lift home, now that your cars are disabled?"

"No, thanks," I said. "Trooper Talbot offered to drive us back to the Farm. He should be waiting outside."

"Well, good-night, then. And Mrs. Wilder, you simply must learn to resist the sweets and starches!"

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Mel Gilden has written several sf stories with a Jewish background for F&SF, most recently "The Ice Cream Golem," (July 1976). He once referred to them as Zion's fiction, which is too good a line to let pass, but perhaps too flip a description of these fine stories, the latest of which you are about to enjoy.

The Green Dog

by MEL GILDEN

It was the hottest part of the afternoon when Spinoza, a fat sloppy ice-cream man who sat in the shade with his back against a tree, saw the green dog again. This time the dog came sniffing around the tires of his ice-cream truck, which was parked at the curb a few yards away. Knowing what the animal had in mind, Spinoza rolled with difficulty to his feet and ran shouting and cursing toward it. The animal looked at him from beneath a shaggy shelf of hair and ran away using a queer sideways gait.

Spinoza swore and chased it a few feet, then stopped and merely sweated. The dog stopped too and they looked at each other. Then, moving almost as smoothly as a cat, the green dog walked across the lawn and sat on the running board.

A young man dressed in tennis whites said, "It likes you. Why don't you take it home instead of chasing it?"

"Mind your own business." But Spinoza stood his ground instead of chasing the dog more, as he had planned.

The young man shrugged and asked Spinoza if it would be too much trouble to sell him an Eskimo Pie. "Ice cream I got," Spinoza said. "Ice cream I got."

The young man took the ice-cream bar and stood near Spinoza eating it slowly. He walked to the side of the truck and looked at the green dog. Spinoza looked elsewhere. The young man said, "Such a dog could be valuable."

"I got no use for dogs."

"You could sell it. After all, a green dog..."

"You want to buy it?"

"My wife would kill me if I brought home another animal."

"You don't see me crying, do you?" Spinoza said.

The man said, "You married?"

"Once."

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The man grunted, said good-by, and walked away.

Spinoza stood before the dog and put his hands on his hips. The dog didn't move. It didn't seem to be afraid of him. Spinoza couldn't figure it out. Of course, he'd never been much good at figuring things out. He said to the dog, "You worth money, *hundt?*"

The dog revealed nothing.

"After all, a green dog." He approached it and patted it awkwardly on the head. "Pretty *hundt,*" he said.

The green dog stayed with Spinoza after their meeting in the park, sitting in front of the refrigeration unit next to the single seat with its hind legs crossed like a swami. It swayed with the motion of the truck as Spinoza rolled the streets working his route. The dog occasionally stared at Spinoza but it never made a sound.

The landlord of the time-stained apartment building where Spinoza lived had made a rule: no pets. Why? Not to dig up the garden of crab grass out in front? Not to make dirty on the shabby linoleum floors? Not to keep awake the neighbors who were up all night long playing music and drinking?

The rule had not mattered before, but now, after locking up his truck in front of the building, Spinoza felt like a thief when he grabbed the dog and wrapped it in his coat. The sun had recently set, and the manager, a woman almost as enormous as Spinoza himself, would be cooking dinner instead of keeping watch at the front window as she usually did during the day.

Watching the window where Mrs. Washington, the manager, usually kept her post, Spinoza ran into the building.

The interior was warm, thick, and dark. He put one hand on the post at the bottom of the stairs and turned to ascend. He walked up the stairs clutching the dog to his chest and at the third floor went into his room. Spinoza closed the door, put the dog down, and pulled the chain on an old standing lamp. In the dull yellow light Spinoza could see the dog was still inside his coat; it hadn't moved.

With his thick fingers Spinoza unwrapped the creature and stood up with his coat over his arm. The dog, the color of grass in the dim light, made a pleasant gurgling noise. "Such a dog," Spinoza said, and shook his head. He put down sheets of newspaper before he left to take his truck back to the ice-cream yard.

On his way home he got off the bus a stop early so he could buy dog food at an all-night market. He walked home in the sweet darkness with dog food in a paper bag dangling from his fist.

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When he got to his building, Mrs. Washington was taking the cool evening air at her window overlooking the street. She said, "Evening, Mr. Spinoza."

Spinoza raised his hand in greeting but went on without saying a word.

Mrs. Washington said, "Mr. Spinoza."

A voice that could shred metal, Spinoza thought. He stopped, then went back to stand beneath her window. She said, "I hear you've been carrying secrets up those stairs, Mr. Spinoza."

"Who says?"

"Sometimes people look out their window. They see things."

"A man's got rights," Spinoza said petulantly.

"We don't allow no pets here."

"What makes you think I got pets? I barely afford to feed myself."

"Just making conversation, Mr. Spinoza. Whatchew got in that bag?"

"What you got in your head?"

"No need for anger, Mr. Spinoza. I got to take an interest. Mr. Philhurst finds out I got animals here, I lose my job."

"You don't see me crying, do you?"

Mrs. Washington glared at him for a moment. Spinoza began to walk into the building, and she called after him, "You better watch it, Mr. Spinoza, or you'll find yourself in the street."

"Bitch," Spinoza yelled up at her and ducked into the hallway. He was grateful that he met no one on his way up the stairs. After some difficulty with the lock he got his door open. The air was full with the reek of rubbing alcohol. He dropped his package on a chair and ran into the bathroom. There he found the plastic bottle on its side on the floor and the dog licking up the puddle around it.

"*Hundt,*" Spinoza yelled, and the dog backed off. "Stupid animal!" He kicked it and this time connected. The dog ran and hid under the couch. Spinoza stalked angrily into his living room, picked up his bag of canned goods and threw it at the base of the couch where the dog had disappeared. His anger not yet spent, he picked up one end of the couch and threw it aside where it landed with a resounding boom. In the dust beneath where the couch had been the dog lay curled up. Spinoza made an unintelligible guttural noise and raised his fists.

Someone pounded on his door. "Hey, Spinoza."

Spinoza marched across the room and flung the door open. He was confronted by a big middle-aged black man in an undershirt and work pants who said, "What the hell's goin' on up here?"

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"Everybody wants to know my business. This is my apartment! I pay rent!"

"Don't lose your cool, dude. We just don't dig all that noise comin' from up here."

"You with your music all night, you got the nerve to —"

"What's the matter, you don't like music?"

"*Schvartze* music all night long," Spinoza screamed.

The black man grabbed the front of Spinoza's shirt and rumbled, "If there's one thing I hate more than honky, it's kike honky."

Spinoza thought about spitting in the man's face but discovered he was too scared to move. He felt pressure in his chest. Spinoza had a sudden premonition that he was going to die in this *schvartze's* arms. They would carry him downstairs and bury him beneath the crab grass, and plunge the FOR RENT sign through his chest. The green dog would find somebody else to plague.

"I was cleaning up the apartment," Spinoza mumbled.

The black man said, "What you need is a nice colored girl to come in twice a week."

Spinoza smiled bleakly. "I got troubles," he said.

"You don't know what trouble is," the black man said and let go of Spinoza's shirt front. "It better be quiet up here or next time I gonna come back with friends. Dig?"

"I dig. I dig."

The black man left and slammed the door. The lead balloon in Spinoza's chest began to deflate. He felt a little better.

Spinoza picked up the green dog and set it on a chair, then carefully moved the couch back where it belonged. By the time he finished, the dog had uncurled itself and was watching him. He picked up the bag of canned dog food and went into the piece of kitchen in back to open one can and set it on the floor.

"Here, poochy," Spinoza said.

The dog looked around the side of the door. Spinoza tapped the can with his fingernail. The dog came into the kitchen and touched the dog food with a front paw; it shook itself and ran out of the room. Spinoza found it in the bathroom lapping up the alcohol again. He shooed it away and cleaned up the mess.

"That stuff is poison," he said to the dog. It looked at him without comprehension and showed no ill effects. He carried it back into the kitchen and stood it in front of the dog food. It was not interested.

Spinoza waved a disgusted hand at it. He warmed up a frozen dinner for himself, ate it, and fell into the bed that he pulled down from the closet. Rhythmic music rose from the apartment below and

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beat against his head until at last about two in the morning he fell asleep among his tangled sheets.

The next day Spinoza found the food still uneaten, but the paper can of kitchen cleanser under the sink had been torn open and the contents were gone. The dog was sleeping on the newspapers Spinoza had put down the day before. Or maybe it was dead? The dog's demise would solve the problem of what to do with it, and maybe he could get his money back on the unopened cans of dog food. But when Spinoza approached to check his theory, the dog got up and looked at him. Spinoza shook his head.

He ate breakfast and left for work. As he walked out the street door, Mrs. Washington accosted him. "I been getting reports about you, Mr. Spinoza."

"I'll charge an entertainment tax."

"You bothering the other tenants, Mr. Spinoza. Making too much noise."

"I'm alive, I make noise." He began to walk toward the bus stop.

"Another complaint, Mr. Spinoza, and you're out," she called after him.

When he arrived at the ice-cream yard there was already a lot of activity. Spinoza walked to his truck and, like the men around him, inventoried the stock left from the day before. When at last he'd written what he needed on the order form, he walked to the back of the yard and put his order behind the others held by a pipe that ran up the outside of one of the two big walk-in freezers.

It was only then that one of the men waiting for their ice cream said, "So *nu*, Murry?"

Spinoza made a noncommittal noise and shrugged. Conversation stumbled on around him; the drivers complained about personal problems even as they solved the problems of the world. College kids, who drove trucks during the summer for money, laughed at the old men or listened to them gravely, or with barely concealed smiles.

Feinberg came out of the freezer carrying a double armload of grey paper cartons. He breathed mist into the warm air and said, "*Nu*, Murry, how are you?" He took the next order from behind the pipe and glanced at it before he put his hand on the freezer's door-handle.

"I found a green dog," Spinoza said.

"A what?" one of the old men said.

"A green dog. You know, like a regular dog, only it's green."

One of the college kids, Melenik, said, "Where'd you get it?"

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"Montrose Park."

Melenik nodded.

The door slammed behind Feinberg when he went into the freezer.

Happy Howard, an old sunburned man who looked as if he had never smiled in his life, said, "What you going to do with it?"

"Who knows? A fellow at the park said it was worth money."

"If it's real," Melenik said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what if it's just food coloring or paint or something?"

"It ain't."

"You're sure?"

"I say it ain't, it ain't."

"All right. I wasn't accusing you of anything."

Spinoza picked at his thumbnail and wondered if Melenik might be right. Spinoza said, "It drinks rubbing alcohol."

Happy Howard said, "That's poison."

"So far it's not dead."

"That's some dog."

Melenik said, "Sell it to a pet store."

"Who asked you?" Spinoza said.

Melenik laughed, Spinoza didn't know why. Spinoza said loudly, "Damn college kids. You think you know everything, but you ain't lived life."

"Sure, Murry," Melenik said.

"Why don't you get out of here?"

Melenik laughed again, and Spinoza got a little red in the face but did nothing because at that moment Feinberg, emerging from the freezer, set his load of ice cream on the table in front of it and asked what the story was on the green dog.

Spinoza said, "Melenik'll tell you. He knows everything."

"Nobody can tell it like you can, Murry."

"Snot nose," Spinoza grumbled.

"*Nu,* Murry," Feinberg said.

Spinoza glared at Melenik — now standing silently by, playing innocent — and told Feinberg his story. Feinberg agreed that selling the dog to a pet store seemed a good idea.

Spinoza bought his ice cream and drove back to his apartment building. After locking the truck he went upstairs to get the dog. Mrs. Washington said good morning to him in a haughty way as he entered the building, and he answered her back politely. He didn't want an argument now.

The dog was sleeping in a heap on the bare boards near the warm outside wall. Spinoza wetted a paper towel; he brought it and a bar of soap to where the dog lay and tried to wash the green off a patch of its fur. The dog awoke, looked at him and gurgled when Spinoza touched it. The green be-

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came darker because it was wet, but it didn't come off. From the fur rose smoke that made Spinoza cough. The dog continued to gurgle.

"Feh," Spinoza said. And while thinking of terrible things he would like to see happen to Melenik for accusing him of not having a real green dog, Spinoza rinsed his hands and dried them.

He wrapped the dog again in his coat and went downstairs. He stopped at the front door and snarled up through the ceiling at where he knew Mrs. Washington waited. Tucking the concealed animal under his arm like a newspaper, he walked out the door.

"Watchew got there?" Mrs. Washington said.

"If it's any of your business," Spinoza said, "a thermos of coffee."

"You surely have a powerful big thirst."

"So?"

"I'm just making conversation, that's all, Mr. Spinoza."

"I wish I had the time. Goodby." He laid the dog on the floor in front of the refrigeration unit and, as quickly as he could, drove away.

There was a pet shop on the way to his route. He'd noticed it once on the corner while waiting for a red light. He went there now, and when he parked it cost him money for the meter. Another investment, like the cans of dog food.

When Spinoza showed him the dog, the man in the pet shop told him there was no such breed registered. The most the man would offer Spinoza for what he called "no more than an interesting mutt" was five dollars. The man suggested Spinoza might get more for the dog if he took it to a laboratory where the shop sometimes sold guinea pigs and rats.

"You think so?" Spinoza said.

"I make no guarantees but it's worth a try."

Spinoza said thank you and carried the dog back to his truck.

It was already late in the morning, and Spinoza knew he would have a difficult time finding a spot for his truck at Montrose Park. The green dog had already cost him money and effort — neither of which Spinoza could afford. While driving, Spinoza decided he would take whatever the people at the laboratory would give him — he would give the dog away if he had to — and get rid of it at last.

He carried the dog into the long white building at the address the man at the pet shop had given him and, after telling a pretty young secretary in front what he wanted, was shown into a tiny office whose desk was surrounded by filing cabinets and stacks of empty cages. On one cabinet was a rank of shiny

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knives on a spotless white cloth, and a human skull. The place smelled to high heaven of rats and their excrement.

Sitting behind the worn wooden desk was a bewildered-looking man in an unbuttoned lab coat. He looked up and smiled when Spinoza entered his office, and when they shook hands, he introduced himself as Dr. Morton.

Spinoza showed him the dog and waited. Dr. Morton asked permission, then prodded the green dog with gentle fingers, looked into its eyes and down its throat with a strong light. He shook his head and said, "I've never seen anything like it."

"How much is it worth?"

Dr. Morton looked at Spinoza, taking his measure, and said, "Fifteen dollars."

"No more?" Spinoza said, though he was elated at the figure. "The green don't come off. I tried washing it myself."

"The dog is unusual," Dr. Morton said, "but useless for experimentation because we have no information on how this type of animal normally reacts."

"Double-talk," Spinoza said.

Dr. Morton shrugged. "I'll give you twenty. But that's my last offer.

"You're giving twenty. Maybe it's worth twenty-five?"

Grimly, the man said, "Twenty."

Worried he might withdraw the offer altogether, Spinoza said, "All right."

Dr. Morton wrote something on a form he took from a drawer and handed it to Spinoza. Dr. Morton held out his hand to be shaken again; Spinoza shook hands, then went back to the front desk where the pretty receptionist looked at the paper and paid him out of petty cash.

It took him forty minutes to get to Montrose Park, but when he got there, a miracle, he found a place at the curb near the swimming pool. The ice-cream business was good.

When he got home that evening, Mrs. Washington asked him where his thermos was, and he told her he'd lost it. He even stayed for a few minutes to talk with her about her son, who was back East at medical school. Spinoza felt good. The green dog was gone, and he'd made a profit on the deal.

But that night while music boomed up through the floor, he lay awake thinking about the dog. It had actually been a pleasant-enough creature, even if its eating habits were a little strange. It had bothered no one and was a companion of sorts, and Spinoza almost convinced himself that if the building had not had a rule against pets, he would have kept it. But the dog was gone now, sold to Dr. Morton for who knew what purpose. Spi-

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noza thought back to the small pungent office, and his mind's eye fell on the operating instruments on the filing cabinet next to the human skull. He saw Dr. Morton wielding the knives and cutting into the dog as it lay bound and whimpering on his desk. It bled green in great spurts that splashed over everything. Dr. Morton was dissecting the dog — now no more than a lump of screaming nerves and meat — and piling up the limbs and giblets on the desk.

Spinoza opened his eyes and turned on the lamp next to his bed. He was sweating. Even after the music stopped, his stomach felt tight and he had trouble getting to sleep.

He crawled from his bed wearily the next morning and, still not able to rid himself of the picture in his head of Dr. Morton covered from head to foot with green gore, went to work and hurriedly loaded his truck with ice cream. After that Spinoza drove to see Dr. Morton. Dr. Morton was keeping the green dog in a laboratory in a cage with barely enough room for it to turn around. The smell in the laboratory was even worse than in the office. Dr. Morton was surprised at Spinoza's request, but when Spinoza stuffed the twenty dollars cash into his hand, he took the dog out of the cage and gave it back. The dog gurgled when Dr. Morton put it in Spinoza's arms. Spinoza ran out of the building clutching it like a baby.

Spinoza kept the dog with him that day and took to calling it Sylvia, after his dead wife. He tried to give it part of the corned beef sandwich he had for lunch, but it refused. Spinoza shook his head but finally decided that if the dog would rather eat soap and there were no ill effects, that's what it would have. After a successful day, Spinoza drove Sylvia to his apartment, first stopping at the neighborhood grocery to buy a can of kitchen cleanser and a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

He wrapped the dog in his jacket and carried it under one arm while the cleanser and alcohol bumped together in a bag in his hand.

Mrs. Washington said, "Good evening, Mr. Spinoza."

"Hello," Spinoza said quickly, but without anger. He kept walking.

"Whatchew got there, Mr. Spinoza?"

"I found my thermos bottle."

"I surely don't think so, Mr. Spinoza."

"Your privilege."

"I think you got an animal there."

"No."

"Let me see, Mr. Spinoza, we won't talk no more about it."

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"You got a search warrant?"

"I'll do better than that, Mr. Spinoza. I'll call the police."

"Nu? So what are you waiting for?" Let them throw him out! Let them try.

Mrs. Washington left the window without saying good-by. Spinoza went into the watery electric brightness of the building and climbed the stairs to his apartment. Inside, he poured the alcohol into a dish and broke open the can of cleanser to let the green powder run out, making a pile on a plate. He put these things on the kitchen floor, and Sylvia ate, gurgling as she did so.

Spinoza was about to leave to take his truck back to the ice-cream yard when someone knocked on the door. It could be fat nosy Mrs. Washington, or Taylor with the music from downstairs, or even the police. He hesitated for a moment, and the knock came again.

"Who is it?"

"A friend."

Probably some gay who wanted to convert him. "Go away," Spinoza said.

"It's about your dog."

"Go away." Spinoza's voice shook.

"I'm sorry." Something in the door clicked and it swung open. Spinoza stared at two big men wearing dark suits and overcoats. Each had his hat in his hand. The one in front said, "May we come in?"

"How did you do that?"

"It's not important."

"It's important to me, somebody can get into my apartment without me knowing it."

The two men came in silently, ducking under the door lintel so as not to hit their heads, and sat on the couch. Spinoza closed the door. His neck prickled. These were not ordinary thieves, or even ordinary missionaries. Each of them had a quiet, somber face with cheekbones like an Indian. They moved gracefully when they moved at all. Spinoza sat in a worn chair opposite them. He could see Sylvia peeking in from the kitchen. From their angle, the two men could not see the dog.

Spinoza said, *"Nu?"*

"Mr. Spinoza," the first man said, "we —"

"You know my name?"

"We know many things."

"How?"

"It's not important."

"What are you, from the government?"

"From *a* government."

"Spys?"

"No."

"What then?"

The men looked at each other, then back at Spinoza. Sylvia hadn't moved. The first man said, "You have something of ours. We are

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prepared to pay you to get it back."

"My dog."

"Yes."

"How much?"

"We are willing to go as high as one hundred dollars, American money."

Spinoza fell back in his chair. There was something going on here, though he could not say what. Dr. Morton had said such a dog was worth twenty dollars at the most. Something funny, that was for sure.

Spinoza said, "Why?"

"We need him."

"You don't see me crying, do you?"

"We can't get home without him."

"You need my dog to get home?"

"Yes."

"So, where is home?"

The men looked at each other again. They waited a long time, as if they were trying to decide something. The first man sighed and said, "Ours is a strange story."

Spinoza crossed his arms but said nothing.

The man went on; "My friend and I are not of this Earth. We come from a planet that circles a sun that is so far away it's light takes hundreds of years to arrive here. You understand?"

"Ask me better if I believe," Spinoza said.

"If you refuse to believe, there is no point in talking."

"Go on," Spinoza said. "Go on."

"Very well. Our ship can travel faster than light, using a method even the two of us do not entirely understand. However, we know the dog is the key, the booster that will allow us to return home in a ship that is more than a coffin."

"A dog?"

"The resemblance is coincidental."

"What?"

"It is not really a dog. You may have noticed the color."

"I noticed." Spinoza shook his head while new ideas whirled without control inside. Such a story — like some of the junk on the newsstands. Spinoza said, "How is it you allow such a valuable animal to run around loose?"

"Carelessness on our part."

Spinoza nodded. "Can you prove all this?"

"Isn't the dog proof enough?" the first man said.

Spinoza waited. Sylvia trotted into the room and sat down cross-legged on the floor between the two men and gurgled. Spinoza could not induce her to come to him. He said, "You could just take the dog and leave."

"We could, but it is not our way."

"Whether you get home or not

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depends on me."

"That's right."

"I could say no, and you'd just walk away and never bother me again."

"That's right."

Spinoza shook his head and frowned. Tears, by themselves, filled his eyes. Could he be happy with the dog, knowing it was his fault these two men — if men they were — were stranded so far from home? He felt compassion and sorrow for them. These were strange emotions for him, and he wondered if they were real even as he marveled at their potency.

The two men waited patiently. They hardly moved. Spinoza could bear it no longer, and so he said, "Feh, who needs it? Take the dog. It'll get me thrown out on the street yet."

The man stood up, the second man lifting the dog gently and cradling it in his arms. The first man produced a roll of bills, and Spinoza, surprised to hear his own voice, said, "Keep the money. Getting rid of that animal is a pleasure. It was nothing but trouble."

"We have no use for the money," the first man said.

"Neither have I."

The man nodded and, together with the silent man and the green dog, went out of Spinoza's apartment. He sat wondering why he could not take their money. He knew only that it would spoil his memory of the dog and he could not. He hurried to the door, suddenly feeling it necessary to say good-by, but there was no one in the short third-floor hallway, and he heard no one on the stairs. He closed the door and ran to his window, but the street was empty.

There was a commotion outside his door — many heavy footsteps and an insistent banging. From the jumble of voices outside, Mrs. Washington cried, "Open this door, Mr. Spinoza. We know you're in there."

Taylor cried through the door, "And we know you got a dog too."

Spinoza bounded to the door with more energy than he'd had in years, flung it open wide and said to the crowd waiting outside, "Come in. Search to your heart's content!"

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JUST ANOTHER PRETTY UFO

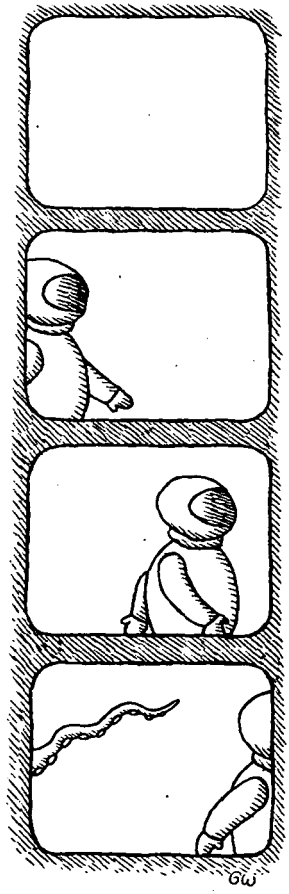
Despite a blurring in the public mind, there is a sharp dichotomy between science fiction and UFO-ology (if that's a word? Let's say it is). And most science fiction people get annoyed, as might anybody (including UFO people) when their views are mistaken for something else, or when something comes along that tends to confuse the confusion further.

Well, something has, and let's try to sort out just what it is. What would you call a dramatized UFO incident? It's not speculative fact (which is what one might call UFO-ology). Is it then science fiction? Loosely, yes, I'd say. The first contact story in s-f is an old and honored tradition, though curiously few take place on Earth, when you think about it. (That is, literarily. Film has many examples, mainly because it's easier and cheaper to do one special effect against "natural" backgrounds than a "natural" human against a milieu of special effects. Also it's easier for the mass audience to empathize with.)

Back to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* which is, if you hadn't guessed, what I'm talking about. So it may loosely be described as science fiction; but in my opinion it isn't very *good* science fiction, since almost everything in it is based on

BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



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the fairly unimaginative level of the UFO tradition. Despite a lavish and expensive production (including literally ear-splitting sound), it really boils down to the old UFO case history cliché, "I Went for a Ride in a Flying Saucer."

Probably closely connected to this is the form of the film, which is identical with the old cheapie UFO thrillers of the '50s. (Who can ever forget *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers?* What? You *have* forgotten it? Tch, tch.) One has tedious amounts of time of fill (two hours + in the case of *Close Encounters*) having to do with the dreary doings of the dreary people involved, with a few teasers of action and/or special effects thrown in to keep you awake. Then for the last 10 or 15 minutes of the movie, we finally get the whole shebang that we came to see.

Admitted, this final part of CE3K (as the really *in* people are calling it) is a bang-up job, with a "mother ship" that looks like Las Vegas torn up by the roots. But once you've recovered from that, and begin to think about the film *in toto*, it is utter nonsense.

For instance, the aliens, who seem to be adept at: operating machines at a distance; making a mess on the kitchen floor; causing minor earthquakes; breaking up marriages; forcing people to sculpt in mashed potatoes; and making really superb theatrical entrances. Now none of these things are necessarily abilities that would make me pick up and go for a long ride in their ship, no matter how big their beautiful green eyes are.

I know a lot of people like this film (mostly the *non*-science fiction readers of my acquaintance), but so far as I'm concerned, it is made for those rather sad persons who want desperately for there to be a great, wonderful, culturally advanced race of daddies (or mommies, considering the "mother" ship) up there, who will come and clear up this terrestrial mess, or at least, take the chosen ones away from it.

As a footnote to the above, I can't resist giving you the two alternate titles I was considering for this column: "A Close Encounter of the Worst Kind" (too obvious) and "The Beatification of Richard Dreyfuss" (too subtle).

Late, late show dept.... Thank God for my sanity, after CE3K, this has been an extraordinary week for TV in my area. In the space of seven days, we got *Things to Come, Forbidden Planet* and *On the Beach!* I've talked about the last one fairly recently, but some continuing thoughts on the others...

I am always awed and touched by the opening of *Things To Come,* released in 1936 and accurately portraying the bombing of London in 1939. Didn't anybody *see* the film then, one wonders, knowing

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that it wasn't all that simple.

And until the coming of *Star Wars,* I can think of no more impressive large scale effects than the "Everytown" of the next century.

It is interesting to note that Wells, in addition to writing the script, had his finger in almost every aspect of the film's production. This makes it essentially his major filmic statement; one wonders what the results would have been if the great precursors, Mary Shelley, Poe, Verne et al. could have done the same thing.

It's the first time I've seen *Forbidden Planet* since *Star Wars;* alas, it now looks a little flat and artificial, and the primitive booze-'n'broads humor (so typical of s/f itself at the time) grates even more. And Anne Francis as Alta is certainly the nitwit heroine of all time.

But still impressive is the surprisingly intellectual subtlety of the major premise of the plot, not to mention that the *de rigeur* love interest is not just gratuitous, but a major factor *in* that plot (because of the arousal of Morbius's paternal jealousy). Also surprising is FP's striking resemblance to a good *Star Trek* episode. Presumably, Roddenberry studied it thoroughly.

Literary dept.... Speaking of *Things to Come,* a book of that title by Douglas Menville and R. Reginald has been published by *The New York Times,* an "illustrated history of the science fiction film." At this point, there are almost too many such, but this one seems particularly good (perhaps because the authors' opinions and mine agree almost 100% — they admire *Zardoz* immensely, for instance). Illustrated with a fine selection of stills, and carrying their history up to *Star Wars,* it's highly recommended from this corner.

Coming next month

ENEMIES OF THE SYSTEM,
a complete short novel by BRIAN W. ALDISS

The time is the far future. It is the millionth anniversary year of the establishment of "Bicom," the miracle of genetic engineering that transformed **Homo sapiens** into **Homo uniformis,** "man alike throughout." A group of tourists from this totally rational "utopia" are stranded on a primitive and savage planet and begin a suspense-filled struggle for survival. This is sf at its best, full of action, intelligence and wit. Don't miss the June issue, on sale May 2.

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Here is a superior story about an instructor of literature at a time in the future when there is no literature, and what happens when she finds a student who says he is a poet and who writes her a Petrarchan sonnet . . .

The Ark Among The Flags

by RAYLYN MOORE

Dark, seamless dark as far as she could see. The language of paradox that, proving her thoughts to have remained touched by poetry even in this moment of anguish and uncertainty following an accident. She had stumbled over a root across the upward trail and fallen heavily on the pine-needle ground cover. The mishap served to remind her of the gravity of her situation. Here again "gravity" was a word of poetic precision, operative on at least three levels, *le mot juste*, as that Gallic genius of a thousand years ago, Flaubert, would have had it.

Being caught by moonless night on a rough wilderness trail with no light or, for that matter, equipment of any kind would be unsettling for anyone, was an especially serious predicament for Miss Pryor, instructor in Before Literature at the Institute for Higher Learning. She had never dealt with nature first-hand nor wanted to. A child of the metropolis, she was accustomed to the totally paved, the constantly illuminated, the absolutely safe world from which all surprises good and bad had been methodically eliminated. And should she want the titillation of the unscheduled event, the startling phenomenon unrefined from its raw state, she could always recall the familiar, comforting, vicarious thrills provided by the Nature Poets (Frost, Thomas, Wordsworth), who had written in the Before, when great tracts of land were actually given over to copses and meadows accessible to all, not just to the "privileged" like herself.

Miss Pryor flailed about on the slithery needles, but her gestures were those of weariness and indecision rather than of awkwardness or imbalance, for that part of it formed the premise on which rested her decision to come to the wilder-

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ness. The fact that she was tall, and that the new weight had somehow accumulated mostly within the original contours of her body had made her plan thinkable. And added to this fortunate circumstance was another. She had reached her first septimal year at the institute, entitling her to time off. If not the whole year, as she had read of teachers having in former times, at least the summer months of Darwin and Galileo.

"Private study and reflection" she had written in a steady hand after the words ACTIVITIES PLANNED BY APPLICANT on the forms she had filled out in multiplicity for a vacation hut in the mountains. It seemed the correct answer for a twenty-eight-year-old, mateless academic person. She was fully aware of the two principal hurdles to be cleared if her septimal leave were to be approved. The area requested was in the one great national park which lay on the Border, where anyone with a slightly smirched dossier would never be allowed. Furthermore, it was an area for winter vacationing, and she was requesting permission to enter it in summer, when the place was ordinarily closed, but the reason for that seemed sound: one should be alone for private study and reflection. It was difficult to be alone in the city and impossible, even with advanced acoustical planning, to find absolute quiet. As for her record, it was as nearly perfect as right living could make it; only the tiny yellow star at the top of her medical chart showed an exception. She had not been selected by Genetic Control as one of those citizens who could procreate.

Therefore, even after her application was approved, she had had to plan desperately, and her wild scheme had somehow seemed possible of success because of its very wildness. It had still seemed possible as recently as this afternoon when the aerotaxi had set her down practically at the door of the hut. The uniformed operator unloaded her luggage and she paid and thanked him. It was only when the orange-yellow coin-shaped craft, a bright fragment of the urban rapid-transit scene which looked curiously misplaced in the primitive setting, had regained the air and set off that she first apprehended the totality of her solitude.

As promised in the brochure, there had been fresh linen, hot water, robot room service, and a menu variable at her own whim, the meals to take shape automatically from a supply of frozen concentrated food ready to be conveyed through instant defrosters and warming ovens. There had also been something else in the seven-room hut which was less easily labeled, some whisper of doubt,

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some susurration of menace, as if the back door might have been just closing on a stranger's presence as she had entered through the front. Oh, she had run everywhere at once, looked everywhere even under the wide, self-consciously sybaritic beds and lounges, and behind every tree trunk within fifty feet of the hut.

After this enervating flurry of activity she sensibly told herself how unlikely it was that they had found her out and already stationed someone here to watch her. There was really no reason to suspect such a thing. She was only undergoing the anxiety of the city dweller faced for the first time with the awesome threats of wilderness living. And she was indeed alone. The aerotaxi would not return until the end of the month to check her supplies. The other huts scattered through the woods and the lodge barely discernible through the trees were unoccupied now. This was a ski resort.

Yet convincing as her own arguments were, she simply could not talk herself out of the terror. Not that she gave up on the talk, the careful reasoning. Was it possible that this growing fear of someone lurking just out of her sight was merely the fear of aloneness inverted? (Miss Pryor did not number Thoreau among her favorite nature writers.) Yes, it was very likely. Then why not dismiss the whole matter and think of something else? So she had sat in quiet determination in the solarium, literally forcing herself to enjoy her instant tea. But in the end the lump of doubt kept her from swallowing. Even then she could have made herself remain through the night at the hut. But a new quantity entered her ruminations, the small quiet sign from inside, a signal she had read of in the secretly obtained literature but not expected until next week at the earliest. Not a pain, only a kind of nearly imperceptible shifting and settling. She might have likened it to a change in position of feathers in a half-filled pillowtick, except that pillows had not been made of such primitive natural material for many centuries.

So she had panicked, but panicked in a way that was in character, remembering to press the button for removal of the tea things, searching her luggage for a light sweater, as if she were going for a short late-afternoon walk in the woods, which in fact she did, carrying nothing but a handkerchief.

She had started up the mountain, picking her random way for a while in the maze of paths on the lower levels; then, finding one that rose more steeply, she stuck to that, panting with the surprisingly on-

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erous effort of moving her heavier body so sharply upward. And after dark she had simply kept going, stopping at intervals to rest and listen. For it was only logical that if a spy *had* been assigned to her, she would certainly be pursued as soon as it became clear that she meant not to return to the hut that night. But there were no sounds, and gradually, after several hours of scrambling forward and then stopping to listen, Miss Pryor decided she was probably alone on the mountain, or as alone as anyone in her condition can be said to be.

Then the sudden stumble over the root in the path, the jarring contact with the steep ground. After her first impatient movements, she decided to remain where she was for a while. True, they might purposely have allowed her to get this far, to believe that she was going to bring it off; then at the last minute the trap would close and she would have lost the game. Or she might actually be safe — so far. In either case, it seemed likely she was free at least from the threat of imminent harassment.

"An archetype," said Miss Pryor to her first eleven o'clock class of the new semester, "is — was —" Her eyes swept theirs, some blank as jelly, some frankly closed in sleep, and went on to take in the square of view outside the sealed window. Rain-washed concrete showed in a restrained decorative pattern of horizontal and vertical plane surfaces; it was the month of Malthus but the only indication of season was in the curling yellowness of the shrubs in their ceramic urns set about the roof patio. For this was the fifty-seventh and top floor of the institute's single humanities building. Every discipline from aerology to zoology sprawled and seeped and oozed through the hundreds of structures on the remaining acres of the campus, the traditional theoretical and practical sciences elbowing those just emerging from the great welter of re-accumulated knowledge in the time of After. But until quite recently there had been no room for either art or artifice. In fact the question which most often struck visitors was how the small scattering of humanities classes managed to consume as many as fifty-seven floors. (The answer was that they did not. Most of the floors below the rained-upon patio were occupied by faculty offices and administrative services. Designation of the big building as "Humanities" was a token only.)

Having taught this course for six years, Miss Pryor had long since begun to recognize the hazards it contained, the stumbling blocks which lie in wait for anyone who dares to break new ground. For one thing, how could she possibly re-

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view the literary theories of a millennium ago when she was forbidden by law to discuss the old myths? Better to start in her usual way, with something less controversial. How had she happened to mention the word "archetype" anyway?

But she could see that dull as the eyes looked, quite a number of the pencils had been moving over the notebooks. She knew therefore that several dozen sentences beginning "An archetype was —" would remain puzzlingly unfinished until she made some further effort. So she labored on. "— an image, or story form, or character type out of our old racial past, from Before. Even from before Before." Here a light scattering of dutiful laughter. "I won't give you an example because these story patterns and the characters they involve are obsolete in our present society. We don't *need* the intrepid slayer of trolls and dragons, or the great liberator who comes of humble birth any more."

Was she on dangerous territory even with this innocent ploy? Probably not unless some inspector made a spot-check of student notebooks. Moreover, she was gratified to observe that several pairs of the jelled eyes had focused, even that a few of the closed lids had snapped open. It was a moment familiar to all those who teach, the more memorable for its rarity of occurrence: the phenomenon of the half-accidental engagment of the half-willing mind. And with it came even more necessity to proceed cautiously. "We have a new mythology now, one which cannot lead to the nearly total destruction of the race as the old one did. We believe only in the *corrected image*, the *fully planned-for act.*

"Romantic unreason has been, quite correctly, identified as the prime cause of the holocaust. But this Nation at least learned from the error and began over with a new age of rationalism in whch we are fortunate in having every aspect of our lives controlled. Thus we avoid disease, poverty, overpopulation, and — in brief — *ir*rationality of all description, the very things that made life in the Before so tenuous. We have literally corrected the past.

"True, we have not managed even yet to correct *all* difficulties. We have had to work twice as hard for twice as long just to repair the ravages the past laid upon us, just to repair, restore, re-catalogue the materials and facts once readily available. And the fact that our Nation, large and strong as it is, has alone elected this strict course while the rest of the world has more or less returned to wallow in the same old romantic morass has led to extreme nationalism, and insular ex-

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istence for ourselves.

"The time may come, however, will surely come, when the Nation is strong enough to convert these other territories to our way of thinking, by force if need be."

Miss Pryor paused, the pencils paused. Miss Pryor began again, so did the pencils.

"The one thing the Before had, which we do not, of course, was a literature. For some unaccountable reason we have found no real storytellers among us, and no poets in this new age. The government has only in this very decade seen this as a failure, which is the reason a few of us have been channeled from technological jobs into studies of the past. It is a rewarding field, but a wholly unfamiliar one for most of you. Some of the names we'll be dealing with this semester are Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Lord Byron, Anton Chekhov, Jean-Paul Sartre, Henry James, Garcia Lorca, Wallace Stevens, Bernard Shaw—"

"A low buzzer insinuated its voice into her lecture. The class shuffled itself into mobile order and filed out. All but one.

"Miss Prewitt?"

"Pryor."

"My name is Shelley, and I write poetry."

"I've no time for jokes."

"Neither have I. But I can't help what my name is."

She looked up finally. He seemed an ordinary sort, about nineteen, fair hair and a great many freckles, aura of extraordinarily good health. She had had dozens of students just like him; in another year the face would be indistinguishable in memory. "I shouldn't let it get bruited about, if I were you," she advised sternly, "the part about the poetry. It's true enough the institute is embarked on a program to revive interest in the arts, but the unauthorized practice of verse writing, by someone wholly unqualified —"

"I know all that. I haven't told anyone but you."

"Well, that wasn't very wise, was it? You hardly know me."

"It was a considered decision, made after sitting through your lecture today."

"Yes, I know some of you were listening, but if I recall correctly, you were one of those who looked half asleep the whole time."

"A trick I use for self-protection. I especially liked the part about the archetypes, but I disagree with you. Maybe we don't need a myth about the hero who fights trolls and dragons, but it seems to me we badly need one about the Great Liberator who is one of us and comes to deliver us out of bondage."

The wave of shock set off by his words seemed literally to strike her in the chest, to rock her off balance.

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Then she rallied, recalling his extreme youth (perhaps he honestly didn't know that his words contained the dangerous seed of potential destruction), and said gently: "I refuse to take the responsibility of encouraging you in a discussion of this kind."

Too late she realized her error. She had been too gentle. He ignored her hint completely, plunged recklessly on. "Well, isn't it true that according to tradition miracles happen in times of greatest necessity, when unbelief is at its peak? I've done a little reading on my own, know a little about history, and I'm really interested. I'm taking your class because —"

"And if you expect to remain in this class, you'll have to drop this subject," she said sharply. Alexander Pope, her mind ticked off almost automatically: This is what inevitably comes of a little learning.

This time Shelley's response was properly sullen, yet at the same time curiously appropriate to her own thoughts. "Sorry. I erred. I'm human after all." (Had he, too, read Pope then? No, surely not, she decided.) "I'm in fact a poet."

She sighed. He had no honor to recommend him, nor even a mitigating ounce of self-doubt. Any poetry he would have managed would be execrable. She preferred males who were wry and subtle, complicated and urban, rare though they were nowadays. "Well, and what do you expect me to do about *that*?" (She already knew, of course.)

"I'd like to show you some of my work, see what you think."

"But certainly you can't bring it here, to the campus. You could never get it through the inspection of books and briefcases."

"But I could bring it around to your living quarters."

Her thoughts reeled. At least it was Pope he admired and probably imitated; Pope, safely ensconced in an older Age of Reason, and not, say, Coleridge, or Ferlinghetti. "Give me time to think it over."

"No, if you think it over, you're certain to say no. If you decide now, at least I have an even chance."

"You're a very knowledgeable young man, aren't you?"

"I'm not as hopeless as you think now."

She liked him better. "All right." She gave him the address of her quarters, a comfortable set of rooms in another high building, this one off campus, where she lived alone. "I'll be home for the next few evenings as a matter of fact. But call first."

He was there that night. And he didn't call first.

His poetry was execrable. She pruned away the worst offenses with her sharpened grading pencil and lent him a collection of Hop-

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kins and one of Dickinson. He came back two nights later to return the books, claiming he was a rapid reader. When she tried to send him away that time, fobbed off with some Yeats, he showed her a Petrarchan sonnet he had just finished. It was execrable too, but it was about *her*. Miss Pryor cried. Needless to say, no one had ever written her a Petrarchan sonnet before; young Shelley was undoubtedly the only member of his generation to have written one at all.

She had had affairs before though. She was discreet. The fact of his being a student of hers, together with the business of the poetry, imposed a need for strict secrecy from the start. No one ever saw John Shelley and Igraine Pryor together, except of course in the eleven o'clock Before literature course, with him sitting in the back row gazing dreamily out on the all-concrete roof-garden patio, pencil moving in occasional brief bursts in response to her words.

When at the end of the semester he had to tell her he was being transferred to another branch of the institute on the opposite side of the Nation, she said nothing to indicate their liaison had resulted in anything out of the ordinary. But then she had told him nothing personal in any case, and certainly nothing about the yellow star on her official papers. She had never quite known herself why it was there. Obviously her mother and father had qualified, and so it could have nothing to do with unapproved racial mixture in her background. Rather it probably could be laid to her grades on the aptitude tests for professions. She had done poorly in science and math, and the state did not want to perpetuate a genetic line which lacked technical potential. This same inadequacy, however, had led her into the field of the Before, which she loved; so she could not complain. Miss Pryor believed in the system. She even went so far in her faith that she could admit that if too many people took to the study of history and literature, and then bred more and more progeny with an aptitude the same as their own, the situation could only threaten the social structure of the Nation.

How *it* had happened was something else. Like all females over the age of puberty, Miss Pryor had access to the three or four infallible drugs which prevented conception. Unlike married women with yellow stars, however, she had not been legally obliged to have her uterus removed. So she was the victim of some fluke, some lapse in chemistry in an age when chemistry never lapsed.

It was nothing serious, of course. All she had to do was press a button which would connect her

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with the medical center which handled her records, and arrange for an immediate abortion paid for by the state. Methods were so refined, the matter could be disposed of all within the hour; with no loss of teaching time. There was utterly no reason to put the thing off; yet Miss Pryor had found herself putting it off and then putting it off again. It was the first truly unreasonable behavior she had ever known herself to be guilty of. Even more unreasonable was the crazy sense of relief she felt when she knew at last that she had waited too long. Whatever happened now, she was committed.

Lying on the sliding pine needles which covered the uneasy slant of mountainside, she slept for several hours, waking when the strange sensations began. Perhaps it was because of the fall over the root, or maybe it would have happened anyway. If she could only have stayed in the hut and abided by her original careful arrangements, she would have been reassured by the presence of nail scissors, dental floss, extra towels, sheets of plastic brought in her luggage (so that no evidence would be left on linen belinging to the hut), and plenty of perineal dressings.

Dawn was incredibly cold; its chill had filtered to the core of her bones as she slept. But the awful dark was being dispelled at last. She would not move except to urinate farther down the slope and then perhaps to find a level spot when the light was full.

Her watch said half past five when one twinge came, and with the next she looked again and discovered it was five fifty. That was good. No uneven fractions of time units to tax her unmathematical brain. Sure enough, the sensation recurred at six ten. But then it happened that, because she seemed to be dozing and half waking only to doze again before she meant to, she found herself unable to track the minutes while at the same time she was aware that whole hours were going by. The sun was high. She experienced a moment of utter clarity once when, fully awake, she was able to focus on reality. The mountain was full of noises. Miss Pryor took the natterings and rustlings and chirps to be the natural sounds of birds and small animals. She was mildly surprised to discover that for all her thoughts of finding a level spot, she still lay approximately where she had fallen. But what she had imagined in the dark was a path between the tall pines showed by day to be no different from the rest of the terrain. There had been no trail.

Taking advantage of her sharpened sense of awareness, which

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might prove temporary, Miss Pryor made practical preparations, removing all garments below her waist and piling them under her head, raking the cleanest of the pine needles into a very thick layer under her hips. The handkerchief, which had been saved without unfolding, she placed ready to one side.

Next time she roused herself the twinges were altogether different, more businesslike and so close together they were running into one another. Her thighs were wet and the still air bore an oppressively warm metallic odor which she decided, after some reflection, was the odor of her own blood. She hoped nothing had gone wrong, but when she tried to remember what the books had said, she found everything driven out of her head by the totally unexpected power of the contractions. At each thrust, a gust of air was forced out of her lungs in a low, animal moan. Miss Pryor might have compared the sound to that made by a lowing cow, if she had ever heard a cow.

When one terrible, slow-building, long-crested wave racked her, it was accompanied by a pain so excruciating that Miss Pryor thought, clearly: This is the worst, and by definition there can be no worse than the worst. She was right. Although the next wave, which produced shoulders, was of almost the same intensity, it was yet not the same, and it had the virtue of spending itself in a soothing, slippery sensation as the rest of the tiny body was forced out onto the pile of needles.

As soon as Miss Pryor realized the contractions were over, she lost no time. Feeling exceedingly fit, hardly even tired, she rose almost to a sitting posture. Unfortunately, the little boy looked blue under his protective layer of cream cheese (it *looked* like cream cheese) and fast-drying blood. She shook out the clean handkerchief and daubed at his face, swabbing out eyes and nostrils. She manipulated his limbs, thumped his back, and when the situation had just begun to appear hopeless, he gave a choked thin cry and seemed to look at her.

"Don't fret," she said as calmly as if she were addressing one of her classes. "We're all alone, but that's rather better than not, for the moment. The trouble is I think we may not be alone for long, which means I shall have to put my plan to work far sooner than I'd intended."

The talking helped. It helped so much that she was able to do the next thing quite naturally. With only passing regret for the sterilized nail scissors in the sealed bottle back in the hut, Miss Pryor bent forward, seized the cord in her strong incisors and snipped it

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neatly a proper distance from the child's belly. Then she tied a good tight knot there and one in the end of the cord leading backward to the placenta. It occurred to her that this last item had not emerged, that the contractions had stopped short with the baby. But she would deal with that later. She could deal with anything now, she thought.

"Just to explain," she went on in her lecturing voice as she pulled the child onto her own body and warmed it with her arms, "we are now at a resort which lies on the northerly border of the Nation. I can't go across, of course, because I've no permission. And there are heavily armed guards who patrol the area constantly. What's more, I've committed a crime against the state, and even if I defected successfully, I'd only be extradited. That's because, even though the laws across the Border are much more relaxed as they apply to residents there, certain reciprocal arrangements with regard to crime must be enforced to insure the best relationship between nations which are close geographically if not ideologically. *You*, however, don't have any dossier, nothing in the world to prove where you belong. And —"

Miss Pryor gasped as the tiny jaws took her nipple. The baby was wonderfully strong.

While he slept later, wrapped in her sweater, she tugged cautiously at the end of the cord which remained between her legs. It took some steady pulling and easing before the final plop, an operation not unlike landing a fish, though Miss Pryor knew nothing of fishing. In the soft black soil under the layer of needles, she made a shallow trench, digging away her fingernails in the process, and raked into it the tangled cord and placenta, the clots of blood and feces, and the rest of the detritus including the handkerchief, now badly soiled. Afterward she moved herself and the boy over to a clean pile of needles.

She fell asleep in the late afternoon and didn't really waken again, even to accommodate the frequently feeding child, until the following morning. Though she thought longingly of food and a bath, of diapers for the baby, it was not with any realistic notion of acquiring them. Her immediate worry was that she might already have waited past the optimum moment. For there was no question any more of being able to lie about in the woods until the real milk came, so the boy would have a better start, and certainly none of returning to the hut. Intuition alone told her these things, but it was now an intuition honed to a fine edge by her close contact with a nature no longer strange to her.

She had noticed a kind of dry,

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gray moss hanging from the lower limbs of the nearby trees, and she was gathering a supply of this when she heard the barely discernible thrum of the aerotaxi. This was bad news because the craft might land in the neighborhood of the lodge, and she had to descend there herself in order to work her plan.

Though there was surprisingly little blood flowing now, she quickly packed herself with some of the moss and put on her skirt. The boy lay awake, not crying, seeming to be looking at her again. "We're going now," she said. "Try ever so hard not to make a noise." She wrapped him carefully in the rest of the moss.

Her watch had stopped. Not that such a thing mattered any more. The only concern now was that she act as swiftly as possible. She descended the hill in less than half the time it had taken to climb it. Like a shy but knowledgeable creature of the woods, she stepped from the shelter of one treetrunk to another in the vicinity of the lodge, until she had looked the place over, made sure no one was yet in sight. The aerotaxi, she decided, must have landed farther down, possibly with a view to keeping out of her sight until they could discover her exact whereabouts and take her by surprise. "We're still all right," she reported softly, nuzzling the baby's incredibly soft, fair hair. "They're on their way, surely, but so are we, and with a bit of luck we'll bring it off."

What Miss Pryor somewhat romantically invoked under the name of "luck," however, was actually the working out of an old tradition of the human race which provides that from time to time ignorance shall triumph over knowledge, and faith over reason. For only an impractical humanities instructor with no head for technical gadgets would have gone to the powerhouse, which was one of the outbuildings at the lodge, expecting against all odds to find it left unlocked and the machinery in working order.

And only sheer ignorance of mechanics would cause a totally untrained and unqualified person to imagine she could locate the correct switch in a panel of unmarked switches and leave it turned on for exactly the proper length of time.

However, all the right things happened on behalf of Miss Pryor, up until the very moment she was discovered coming down the mountain alone by the arresting party from Genetic Control. Later she told them — it was on the last evening before her case was officially terminated in the usual way — that the child had been born dead, and she gave confused directions to

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the fictitious grave. And she was believed; no one even bothered trying to confirm the story.

Nor did anyone from the Nation suspect (nor at this time, anyway) that earlier, some miles away up the mountain on the day of Miss Pryor's arrest, an event of no little historical importance had taken place near the summer home of a young couple from the other side of the Border. Here, where unrestricted use of the wilderness area had resulted in a whole settlement of cottages and camps occupied both summer and winter, the woman had glanced down from their high ridge and remarked, "That's strange. The chair lift is running."

Her husband was doubtful. "Are you sure? They must have turned it on by mistake."

"I saw the chairs moving. It looks from here as if someone's left a package on one of the seats. I'm going down to see."

"It's quite a way. And you have to cross the border to get there. That's their territory. Be a bit careful, won't you? Wait, I'll come with you. Someone over there might be playing a trick."

But the young woman was not so untrusting. She hurried down the long slope, climbed over a locked steel gate, and reached the platform at the lift terminal.

She bent over the stopped chair, loosened a safety belt, and strained the bundle to her, already guessing, from what she knew of conditions Over There, what must have happened. She herself was nearly thirty, and barren, and she rightly regarded the contents of the moss-wrapped package as a miraculous gift.

("*Books,*" *from page 31*)

doing a second or third finished painting on a $100 cover, and yet finding it impossible not to be excellent, are the people who made of this field more than just a pile of ephemera, although none of them took thought for tomorrow. For them it was always now — *this* piece of work, for its own sake in the fatigue-ridden reaches of *this* night, for *this* reader and for what you thought of yourself.

It shows. This stuff does not grow old. It is born of everything you had thought and tried up to *now*, and it cannot grow old, for nothing about it was postponed for a time which might not come.

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BY LAND AND BY SEA

I am writing my autobiography and it is running longer than I had expected. This is not because my life has been exciting and full of incident, or because it has been wound up with the great events of the world, or because I have known great people and have been involved in great causes. It's just that I do tend to run on and on when I am on my favorite subject.

The result is that I am consuming paper at a great rate, and the other day, when I stopped at a stationery store to buy a ream of onion-skin, it occurred to me that it was silly to make the trip so often. I therefore said to the young man behind the counter, pointing upward, "Let me have two reams of onion-skin, that kind you've got up there near the ceiling."

He fetched a ladder, shinnied up it, seized a ream and started down. I cried out to him, "No, no, *two* reams, *two* reams — one, two." I held up two fingers to help him get the idea.

He hesitated. *Two* reams must have seemed, to his uncomplicated mind, to be against nature. But he took the second ream and brought both down slowly. As I paid for them, he looked at me curiously, as though trying to penetrate the

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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strange motivations that led me to such an outlandish purchase and said, "Say, what are you doing? Writing a book?"

"I have been known to do so," I said austerely, and left. I thought it was a very moderate answer considering that the number of my published books was, at that moment, 188.

I *am* writing a book. For over a quarter of a century I have been writing a book on any day you care to name. Every time I write one of these essays I write 1/17 of a book, for every 17 of them are collected into one by the esteemed people at Doubleday.

What's more, I'll never run out of subjects, because anything at all can inspire one. Did I talk about Antarctic icebergs last month? Well, then, let's talk about how they came to be discovered and when. And, of course, I'll begin at the beginning.

The earliest hominids seem to have evolved, perhaps as long as 10 million years ago, in east-central Africa, roughly where the Equator is. From that starting point, the hominids evolved and spread outward — ever outward.

If we were to reason strictly from Earth's spherical nature, we would suppose that the hominids would spread northward and southward to an equal extent. In moving away from the equator, it makes no difference whether you go north or south; a sphere is symmetrical in that respect. Even a rotating sphere, revolving about the Sun with a tipped axis, is symmetrical north and south.

The accident of land formation, however, introduces an asymmetry. Africa narrows and comes to an end fairly soon as we move southward. To the north it broadens out and is connected by a land bridge to the even vaster continent of Eurasia.

The amount of land which primitive hominids could encounter in moving north of the equator is some seven times as great as that which they would encounter in moving south of the equator.

Even if we allow for the fact that much of the northern lands are too cold for hominids evolved in the tropics, the potential drift is northward rather than southward.

This accident of geography has affected humanity all through history so that civilizations tended to arise in the Northern Hemisphere rather than the Southern and that exploration penetrated the Arctic long before the Antarctic.

What I am going to do then is to consider the southward push, the

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harder direction for human expansion, and see by what steps it took place even though — I warn you — I may take the long way round to do so.

The hominid ancestors of man did travel southward into South Africa, of course, and fossils of the Australopithecines were first found there in 1924.

The southernmost point of the African continent is Cape Agulhas (uh-GUL-us) which is 160 kilometers (100 miles) southeast of Capetown. It is quite possible that some small Australopithecine may have stood on that point of land more than a million years ago. If so, that would represent the farthest south any hominid predecessor of Homo sapiens ever reached. It is not very far south, to be sure, for it is only 34.5° S., about as far south of the Equator as Beirut, Lebanon, or Wilmington, North Carolina is north of it.

But then, no hominid before Homo sapiens was ever capable of crossing a significant stretch of open sea. This means that the early hominids were confined to the "World Island," Africa, Asia and Europe. In addition, they reached the westernmost islands of Indonesia by getting across the narrow straits separating the Malay peninsula from Sumatra, and Sumatra from Java.

The World Island was undoubtedly very thinly populated by these early hominids, but Homo erectus, who flourished between half a million and a million years ago, existed in northern China and in Indonesia, where their fossil remains received such names as Peking Man and Java Man.

Homo sapiens (which includes "Neanderthal man" as well as ourselves) was in existence at least as long as 350,000 years ago and eventually became the only hominid existing, either through default, or by actually hunting down the more primitive specimens.

When it came time for hominids to spread beyond the confines of the World Island, it was Homo sapiens that did so.

Prehistoric Homo sapiens were no better at crossing stretches of sea than our hominid predecessors were, but we managed to take advantage of land bridges that formed when the sea-level dropped in glacial periods. Perhaps 25,000 years ago, human beings managed to make their way across the islands of the Indonesian archipelago and finally reached New Guinea and Australia.

The invaders worked their way southward, and when they reached the southeastern corner of Australia (what is now the state of Victoria), they broke the hominid record for southern penetration, for that part of the

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continent extends farther south than southernmost Africa. Indeed, Southeast Cape, the southernmost point of Australia is at 39.08° S., about as far south of the equator as Valencia, Spain, or Washington, D.C., is north.

That does not represent the true record in that area of the world, though. The island of Tasmania is 200 kilometers (125 miles) southeast of Australia, and this, too, was reached and occupied by the invaders. The southernmost part of Tasmania is also called Southeast Cape, and that is at 43.48° S., as far south of the equator as Florence, Italy, or Toronto, Canada, is north.

At the time that Australia was reached by immigrants from southeastern Asia, North America was reached by immigrants from northeastern Asia.

The human beings entering North America worked their way southward the full 16,500-kilometer (10,250-mile) length of the two American continents and may, by 8000 B.C., have reached the southern tip of South America.

As it happens, the southernmost 1100 kilometers (700 miles) of the narrowing horn of South America (a region called Patagonia) is farther south than any other continental area of the world.

The southernmost point of South America is at nearly 54° S., which is as far south of the equator as Hamburg, Germany, or Edmonton, Alberta, is north.

South of this southern tip of South America is a large island surrounded by a haze of smaller islands which we can lump together as Tierra del Fuego (tee-ER-uh-del-foo-AY-goh). Its southernmost point is Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn) which is at 56.00° S., as far south of the equator as Edinburgh, Scotland, or the southernmost bit of the Alaska panhandle is north.

Tierra del Fuego is the southernmost bit of land that, even to this day, is permanently occupied by human beings.

To summarize, then, whereas the predecessors of Homo sapiens were restricted to the World Island and reached no farther south than the southern tip of Africa; Homo sapiens, in prehistoric times penetrated both Australia and the Americas, reaching farther south than Africa in both new continents, and attaining Tierra del Fuego at about the time that cities were beginning to arise in the Near East and what we call "civilization" was coming to birth.

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These penetrations of Homo sapiens, up to 8000 B.C., however, were essentially the kind of expansions that roving tribes could achieve on foot. They spread out over continuous land, or over streams that could be forded, or over arms of the sea that could be crossed in glacial times. Any bits of land that remained separated from the continental areas by sizable widths of ocean remained human-free even as late as Roman times.

The final exploration of the Earth had to depend on the development of ships capable of extended voyages, on the coming of maritime development. After 8000 B.C., human expansion was by sea, rather than by land.

The first maritime people were the Minoan Cretans, who developed a navy as early as 3000 B.C., but their activities were confined to the eastern Mediterranean.

The next group of remarkable mariners were the Phoenicians who reached their peak after 1000 B.C., when they burst out of the Mediterranean and became the first to maneuver their ships long distances across open ocean. They reached the British Isles to the North and did better than that to the south.

The Greek historian, Herodotus, writing about 430 B.C., tells us that about 600 B.C., the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho sent out a fleet of ships, manned by Phoenicians, to explore the African shores. They apparently sailed down the Red Sea and returned by way of the Strait of Gibraltar in a voyage that lasted three years.

Herodotus haughtily refuses to believe one story told by the Phoenicians. He says, "These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Africa, they had the sun on their right — to northward of them."

Herodotus knew that the noonday Sun was always to the south of the zenith in Greece and in all the lands that he had visited, and he apparently considered this a law of nature. Yet if the Phoenicians had really rounded Africa they would have penetrated into the South Temperate Zone, and the noonday Sun would indeed have been to the north of zenith. It is precisely the story Herodotus would not believe that makes us confident that the Phoenicians were telling the truth — for they could not have dreamed of a northward Sun (at a time when Earth was not yet perceived to be a globe) without having actually seen it.

Nothing came of this voyage, however, and the next group of great mariners in the Atlantic were the Vikings, fifteen centuries later. After A.D. 800, the Viking sea-raiders terrorized the coasts of Europe and car-

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ried their explorations westward and northwestward into Arctic regions. They settled Iceland permanently and Greenland temporarily, and seem to have reached the coast of North America. (Meanwhile, the Eskimos, in more traditional land-bound fashion, were colonizing the northern shores of North America and Greenland.)

The Vikings, however, remained in the northern hemisphere and it is the southward exploration — the harder direction — that concerns me here.

On the shores of the Pacific and Indian Oceans there were Chinese and Arab vessels which penetrated the ocean for purposes of trade, but their deeds were dwarfed by the Pacific Island people who, considering the technology at their disposal, were far and away the most daring and accomplished seafarers the world has ever seen.

Starting from New Guinea, human beings must have managed to reach some of the smaller islands to the east — the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, and so on, which make up the region now known as Melanesia.

Then about A.D. 300, certain islanders from Melanesia broke out into the vast Pacific and, over the next thousand years criss-crossed the ocean and settled virtually every island in it. In the end, they had occupied an enormous Pacific triangle covering 14,000,000 square kilometers (5,500,000 square miles), a triangle that was almost all water, of course. This area is now called Polynesia ("many islands" — from the Greek), and the navigators are Polynesians.

The drift was mainly northward into the warmer waters. The northern apex of the triangle was Hawaii and the eastern apex Easter Island.

It was not until late medieval times (in Europe) that the most significant southern penetration was made by the Polynesians. Until then the large islands of New Zealand had remained human-free; the largest piece of temperate land remaining empty that late in history. (In fact, except for bats, it was mammal-free, which made it a paradise for wingless birds such as the moa.)

In A.D. 1300, however, the Maori, a Polynesian people, reached New Zealand and established the southern apex of the Polynesian triangle (and within three centuries had wiped out the moas).

New Zealand consists of two main islands, North Island and South Island. To the south of South Island is Stewart Island, whose southernmost point is at 47.17° S., or as far south of the equator as Nantes, France, or Tacoma, Washington, is north.

Until the dawn of modern times, the colonization of New Zealand by

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the Maoris represents the farthest south penetration of maritime humanity. New Zealand reaches farther south than any point in Africa or Tasmania, but falls well short of the southernmost portion of South America.

Nevertheless, by the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, all the significant land areas of the world were populated, except for those which, by virtue of their sheer physical hostility to human beings (deserts, mountain tops, polar regions) could not be inhabited.

What drove humanity further? The necessities of trade.

Europe and the Orient had been trading even in ancient times by means of slow land caravans and through many middlemen, with the result that silk, pepper and other commodities reached Europe. The European nations on the Atlantic shores were at the end of the line, and the Oriental commodities they wanted were increasingly hard to get, chiefly because of the activities of the middlemen, some of whom, like the Turks, were actively hostile, and some of whom, like the Venetians, were merely greedy.

The result was that some westerners conceived the notion of skipping all the middlemen and dealing with the Orient directly. The only way this could be done was by sea, and that meant going around the World Island.

This could be done by either skirting its northern shores ("the northeast passage") or its southern shores ("the southeast passage"), and the trouble was that no west European had ever done either. It wasn't known whether those shores were practical lanes for seafaring men, or, in fact, whether they existed at all. It might well be that there was no sea connection at all between west Europe and east Asia. After all, there might be two landlocked oceans on Earth, one off the shores of west Europe and one off the shores of east Asia.

(The Phoenician voyage of 600 B.C. was a strong indication that there was a single ocean, but only those who read Herodotus knew of it, and Herodotus said he didn't believe it.)

The hunger for Oriental commodities drove west Europeans to ocean exploration, nevertheless. Here they were mightily helped by the use of the mariner's compass, something the Phoenicians, Vikings, and Polynesians did not have, and which came into use in Europe in the 1200s.

The compass, by the way, was first developed by the Chinese, who, in the European Middle Ages, led the world in marine technology. The Chinese, however, over-satisfied with their own highly refined and subtle civil-

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ization, chose deliberately the route of isolation and put an end to their ocean voyages. They let the world pass as unworthy of their notice.

The result was that eventually the world intruded in the form of western ships armed with the compass and with gunpowder, which they had taken from the Chinese and improved. The Chinese had to pay for their snub of technology with some two centuries of humiliation. — There's a moral there, but I won't bother pointing it out.

Of the European nations, Portugal led the way. The northeast passage, assuming it existed, didn't look promising. It would mean passing the Scandinavian coast, which was known to be inhospitable, and there was the expectation of worse beyond. The southeast passage, however, was completely unknown and might, therefore, be infinitely the superior.* For the first time, south was the easier direction.

Portugal's guiding genius in this respect was King John I's younger son, Prince Henry (known in history as "Henry the Navigator").

The Portuguese were fighting the Muslims on African soil, and in 1415 Henry took part in a battle at Ceuta, on the northwestern tip of Africa, and was knighted for heroism. Although he himself never penetrated deeper into Africa, he fell in love with the continent and with the project of exploring its coasts. He dedicated his life to working out the southeast passage.

He established an observatory and school for navigation at Sagres on Cape St. Vincent in 1418. This was in southernmost Portugal at the southwestern tip of Europe. Year after year he outfitted and sent out ships that inched their way farther and farther down the African coast. He even supervised the collection of astronomic data to ensure the greater safety and success of the ships.

The effort was, allowing for the technological level of the times, rather the equivalent of the effort to reach the Moon in our own times. Things moved more slowly then than now, however, and by the time Henry the Navigator died in 1460, his ships had only reached the westernmost bulge of Africa, where Dakar is now situated, and were only about one-fifth of the way around the continent.

The effort survived Henry's death, however. Portuguese ships kept probing farther, looking for a place where the coast would turn eastward. For a while, they thought they had it when, at the southern end of what is

*And possibly not. Some people felt that the equatorial zones were inpenetrable zones of insupportable heat.

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now Liberia, the coast turned eastward for 1500 kilometers (900 miles) and then turned — southward again.

Finally, in August 1487, the Portuguese navigator, Bartolomeu Dias set sail with three ships. Having gone farther south than any Portuguese navigator before him, he was caught in a storm and driven farther south still. When the storm let up, he found himself out of sight of land. He sailed northward and on February 3, 1488, reached a coast that was going east and west. He sailed east long enough to see that it was going to turn northward again.

Satisfied that he had rounded the southernmost part of Africa, he backtracked and named the point of land which marked the eastward turn of the coast as the "Cape of Storms." King John II of Portugal, on hearing the news when Dias returned, more properly called it the Cape of Good Hope. (It is not quite the most southerly point of the continent.)

This marked the beginning of the west European domination of the sea-lanes, a domination that continued for four and a half centuries. Achieving the southeast passage was now just a matter of perseverance (but Dias had not yet equalled the southernmost penetration of the Polynesian mariners in New Zealand).

It was clear that Africa extended so far southward that the southeast passage would represent a sailing length of about 20,000 kilometers (12,500 miles). It seemed to some, notably to Christopher Columbus of Genoa that, since the world was a globe, it would be simpler to reach the eastern coast of Asia by sailing due west. Columbus believed that the Earth was 18,000 miles in circumference and that east Asia extended farther east than it did (following errors in Ptolemy's book on astronomy which was then fifteen centuries old). Columbus felt therefore that a westward journey of some 5,000 kilometers (3,000 miles) would reach the Asian coast, and this was only a quarter the length of the southeast passage.

He couldn't sell his idea to the Portuguese, however. They suspected the Earth was 25,000 miles in diameter, based on their greater navigational experience. They therefore felt that the "western passage" would be nearly as long as the southeast passage. Furthermore, the western passage would be out of sight of land all the way, while the southeast passage could follow coasts and find havens most of the way.

The Spanish monarchs, after being badgered unmercifully by Columbus, decided to get rid of him. They sent him on his way with three derelict ships and a convict crew and fully expected never to see him again.

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But we know what happened. Columbus returned in triumph, and Spain was on its way to a period in which it would be the strongest nation on Earth. The Portuguese king was sporting enough to congratulate Columbus, but he could afford that. He was probably certain that the new shores, whatever they were, were not Asia, and that he would still beat Spain to the punch as far as trading with the Orient was concerned — and he did.

In 1497, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama rounded Africa and made his way up its eastern coast, striking eastward across the Arabian sea and landing in Calicut on the southwestern coast of India. The southeast passage had been achieved.

It was on da Gama's voyage, by the way, that the length of the trip and the monotony of the sailors' diet finally managed to deplete the crew of vitamin C and bring on the first attack of shipboard scurvy, something that was to plague long-distance mariners for two and a half centuries.

The Portuguese were able, as a result of their explorations, to build up the first European overseas empires and to take non-European slaves, a practice other European nations were to follow for centuries, until all gave up those empires — the Portuguese last.

Columbus died in 1506, insisting to the end that he had reached Asia, but the suspicion grew steadily that he had not.

In 1504, an Italian navigator, with the Latinized name of Americus Vespucius, first published arguments to the effect that the land Columbus had discovered was a hitherto unknown continent and that Asia lay still further westward behind a *second* ocean.

In 1507, a German geographer, Martin Waldseemüller, accepted this notion and marked off the new continent and the second ocean on a map he drew. He suggested the new continent be named America in honor of Vespucius, and this, in my opinion, was a just suggestion.

A Spanish explorer, Vasco Nunez de Balboa, was living on the Atlantic shore of what we now call Panama, a place that was one of the centers of early Spanish colonization of the Americas. Balboa had no notion that he was living on a narrow isthmus, of course.

On September 1, 1513, he organized an expedition inland to search for gold, for he was badly in debt. On September 25, after topping a rise, he found himself gazing at a wide expanse of water with no sign of an opposite shore. It could not be the Atlantic Ocean because the Atlantic coastline nowhere curved so as to get in front of him like that. Balboa called

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what he saw the "South Sea" because at that point it lay to the south of the shoreline.

Balboa could not tell in that one glance that he had discovered the second ocean concerning which Vespucius had theorized, but he had. Further explorations made it certain, and now it seemed that to reach Asia from Europe going westward, one had to skirt the Americas either on the north or on the south and then keep on going. In other words there was now the possibility of a "northwest passage" and a "southwest passage."

You might ask: Why bother? The southeast passage was practical and effective.

Ah, but the Portuguese had a stranglehold on that and were not disposed to share it. If the Spaniards wanted to cut in on the lucrative trade with the Orient, they had to move through either the northwest passage or the southwest passage, and again there was the question of whether either was navigable, or whether either existed at all.

The answer came — next month, for I see I am out of space.

CORRECTION

In "The Real Finds Waiting" (*F&SF*, January 1978), I used David Morrison's system of classifying asteroids into "C" (carbonaceous) and "S" (stony). I listed the asteroids Pallas and Vesta under the classification "U" and said, "the brightest ones, like Vesta, still pose a puzzle and their chemistry is considered unknown."

The statement happens to be wrong. The astronomer, Michael J. Gaffey, of the University of Hawaii, one of *the* experts in the field, wrote at once to tell me so. The truth is that Vesta does not fall neatly into either the C or the S classification and the U used in connection with it stands *not* for "unknown" but for "unclassified."

Clearly, an object may be unclassified even though a great deal may be known about it and Vesta's chemistry has been examined more thoroughly than that of any other asteroid. The analysis of the light it reflects shows that light to have the characteristics of light reflected from an aucritic basaltic achondrite (pyroxene plus plagioclase.) Vesta may well be composed, in other words, of a fairly common stony material.

— It makes me feel very fortunate that so many experts read what I write and are kind enough to correct me when that is required. It also makes me feel very terrified.

— Isaac Asimov

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Glen Cook, who had a short piece in our March issue, "The Seventh Fool," returns with a colorful and action-filled sea-going fantasy, about the crew of the Vengeful Dragon *and their search for a phantom ship.*

Ghost Stalk

by GLEN COOK

I

It seemed we had been aboard the *Vengeful D.* forever, madly galloping the coasts from Simballawein to The Tongues of Fire. We looked toward land with the lust of stallions for mares beyond a twelve-foot fence. But our barrier was far less visible. It consisted solely of Colgrave's will.

"Going to the Clouds of Heaven next time I hit Portsmouth," said Little Mica, bending over his needle. He was forever patching sail. "Best damned cathouse on the coast. Best damed cats. Going to make them think Old Goat God himself has arrived." He giggled.

It was Subject Number One with Little Mica. It was with most of us. I had never met a sailor who was not drunk or horny. He would be both if he had his feet on dry land.

"Runt like you couldn't satisfy a dwarf's grandmother," Student remarked from behind the inevitable book. They dueled with insults awhile. There was little else to do. We were running before a steady breeze.

During the exchange Student's eyes never left his book.

It was one we had taken off a Daimiellian two-master months earlier. We were due to take another vessel soon. (Maybe The One. I hoped. I prayed. Colgrave had vowed to remain at sea till he found her.) Our stores were running low. There was mold down to the heart of the bread. Maggots were growing in the salt pork, which had gotten wet in a recent storm. There was no fruit to fight the scurvy. And we were down to our last barrel of grog. One lousy barrel would not last me long.

I had no stomach for a beach raid just there, much as I wanted to feel earth and grass beneath my soles. We were a half dozen leagues

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north of Cape Blood, off Itaskian coasts. Those were shores Trolledyngjans habitually plundered. And it was their season for hell raising. Coast watchers were, likely, considering us with cold, hard eyes at that moment.

"Sail ho!"

Men scrambled, clearing the decks. I glanced up. As usual, Lank Tor, our chief boatswain, was in the crow's nest. He was as crazy as the Old Man.

Colgrave stalked from his cabin. As always, he was armed and clothed as if about to present himself at court. The boatswain's cry, like a warlock's incantation, had conjured him to the weather-decks. "Where away?" He would not go below till we had caught her. Or she shook us. *That* seldom happened.

I peered to seaward. There were always squalls off Cape Blood. That day was no exception, though the storm was playing coy, lying on the horizon instead of embracing the coast. Prey ships liked to duck in to escape. The rocky shoreline offered no hope better than drowning amidst wreckage and thundering surf.

"On the bow!" Tor shouted. "Just round the point and making the landward tack."

"Ah-ha-ha-ha," the Old Man roared, slapping his good thigh.

His face had been destroyed by fire. The whole left side was a grotesque lava flow of scar tissue. His left cheekbone showed an inch square iceberg tip of bare bone.

"We've got her. Had her before we ever saw her."

Cape Blood was a long, jagged, desolate finger of rock diddling the ocean across the paths of cold northern and warm southern currents. If the ship *were* round the point and on a landward tack, she was almost certainly caught. We had a strong breeze astern. She would have to shift sail for a long seaward tack, coming toward us, piling onto the rocks round the headland. That turn, and bending on sail, would take time too.

"Shift your course a point to starboard," Colgrave roared at the helmsman. Toke, our First Officer, so summarily relieved of his watch, shrugged and went to watch Hengis and Fat Poppo, who had the chip log over the side.

"Making eight knots," he announced a moment later. The Old Man eyed the sails. But there was no way we could spread more canvas. With a breeze like the one we had we always ran hell-bent, hoping to catch somebody napping.

"She's seen us," Tor shouted. "Starting to come around. Oh! A three-master. Caravel rigged." We were a caravel ourselves, a stubby, pot-bellied vessel high in the bows and stern.

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The Old Man's face brightened. Glowed. The ship we were hunting was a caravel. Maybe this was The One.

That was what we called her aboard *Vengeful Dragon*. No one knew her true name, though she had several given her by other sailors. The Ghost Ship. The Hell Ship. The Phantom Reever. Like that.

"What colors?" Colgrave demanded.

Tor did not answer. We were not that close. Colgrave realized it and did not ask again.

I did not know if the phantom were real or not. The story had run the western coast almost since the beginning of sea trade, changing to fit the times. It told of a ghost ship crewed by dead men damned to sail forever, pirating, never to set foot on land, never to see Heaven or Hell, till they had redeemed themselves for especially hideous crimes. The nature of their sins had never been defined.

We had been hunting her for a long time, pirating ourselves while we pursued the search. Someday we would find her. Colgrave was too stubborn to quit till he had settled his old score. Or till we, like so many other crews who had met her, fed the fish while she went on to her next kill.

The Old Man's grievance involved the fire that had ruined his face, withered his left arm, and left him with a rolling limp, like a fat galleon in a heavy ground swell. The phantom, like so many pirates, always fired her prey when finished with them. Colgrave, somehow, had survived such a burning.

His entire family, though, had gone down with the vessel.

The Captain, apparently, had been a rich man. Swearing he would find The One, He had purchased the *Vengeful Dagon*. Or so the story went, as it had been told to us.

None of us knew how he had gotten rich in the first place. All we really knew about him was that he had a terrible temper, that he compensated for his disfigurement by dressing richly, that he was a genius as a pirate, and that he was absolutely insane.

How long had we been prowling those coasts? It seemed an age to me. But they had not caught us yet, not the Itaskian Navy, or the witch-mastered corsairs of the Red Isles, or the longshipmen of Trolledyngja, nor the warships of the many coastal city-states. No. We caught them, like spiders who hunted spiders. And we continued our endless hunt.

Always we hunted. For the three-masted caravel with the dead-man crew.

II

"Steward!" Colgrave called.

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"Half pint for all hands." The Old Man seldom spoke at less than a bellow.

Old Barley flashed a sloppy salute and went looking for the key to the grog locker. That was my cue. Grog had been scarce lately. I shuffled off to be first in line.

From behind his book Student remarked to Little Mica, "Must be rough to be a wino on the *Vengeful D.*"

I threw him a daggers look. He did not glance up. He never did. He was not interested in observing the results of his razor-tongued comments.

As always, Priest fell in behind me, tin cup in hand. Service aboard *Vengeful Dragon* and a taste for alcohol were all we had in common. I suppose, though, that that made him closer to me than to anybody else. He was universally, thoroughly hated. He was always trying to save our souls, to get us to renounce sin and this mad quest for a phantom killer little more evil than we.

Priest was strange. He was blue-assed hell in a boarding party. He went in like he meant to cutlass his devil right back to Hell.

The Kid and my friend Whaleboats jockeyed for the third position, till the Old Man turned his one ice-blue eye their way. The Kid did a fast fade. He was supposed to be on watch.

Kid had not been with us long. We had picked him up off a pentaconter in the Scarlotti Gulf. We had taken her in full view of Dunno Scuttair's wharves. Their little navy had been too scared to come out after us.

Kid was crazy-wild, would do anything to get attention. He and I did not get along. I reminded him of the headmaster of the orphanage he had been fleeing when he had stowed away aboard the pentaconter.

I had heard that that headmaster had been murdered, and arson, that had taken a score of lives, had been committed on the orphanage. The Kid would not say anything one way or the other.

We kept our sins to ourselves.

Few of us got along. *Dragon* remained taut to her maintruck with anger and hatred.

Ah. A life on the rolling wave, a cruise on the *Vengeful D.*, buccaneering with sixty-eight lunatics commanded by the maddest captain on the western ocean . . . Sometimes it was Hell. Sheer, screaming Hell.

Old Barley was having trouble finding the key. The old coot never could remember where he had put it so he would not miss it next time he needed it.

"Shake a leg down there, buzzard bait. Or I'll bend you to the bowsprit for the gulls."

That would get him moving.

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Barley was a coward. Scared of his own shadow. You told him something like that, and if he thought you were serious, he would carve you into pieces too small for fish bait. He was the only man aboard meaner than Colgrave and deadlier than Priest.

Curious what fear could do to a man.

Little Mica, leaning on the rail, said, "I can see her tops."

"So who cares?" Whaleboats replied. "We'll see all we want in an hour." He had been through the stalking dance so often it was all a dreadful bore for him now.

Whaleboats had picked up his nickname long ago, in an action where, when we had been becalmed a half mile from a prospective victim, he had suggested we storm her from whaleboats. It had been a good idea, except that it had not worked. They had brought up their ballast stones and dropped them through the bottoms of our boats. Then the breeze had freshened. We had had to swim back to *Dragon* while they sailed off. That vessel was one of few that had gotten away.

Mica persisted. "Why's she running already? She can't know who we are."

"What difference does it make?" Whaleboats growled. "Barley, if you're not up here in ten seconds . . ."

"Ask Student," I suggested. "He's got all the answers." But some he would not tell, like how to retire from the crew.

She was running because she had to. Anyone beating round Cape Blood who encountered a vessel running before the wind did so. Nine times out of ten, the second ship was a pirate who had been lying in ambush behind the headland. I had never understood why the Itaskian navy did not keep a squadron on station there, to protect their shipping. Maybe it was because the weather was always rotten. That day's fairness was unusual in the extreme.

Nervously, I glanced at the squall line. Had it moved closer? I hated rough weather. Made me sick. Grog only made it worse.

Old Barley showed up with the bucket he had tapped off the barrel. There had better be some on the three-master, I thought. Doing without made me mean.

The Old Man stood behind Barley, beaming at us like a proud father. For that moment you would have thought he had completely forgotten his prey in his concern for his crew.

Dragonfeathers. The hunt was all that ever mattered to him.

He would sacrifice everyone and everything, even himself, to fulfill his quest. And we all knew it.

I thought, I could reach out

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with my fish knife . . . *schlick-schlick,* and spill his guts on the deck. End it all right now.

I would have to remind Tor to get sand up from ballast before we closed with the caravel. To absorb the blood. He never remembered. He forgot a lot from day to day, remembering only his name and trade. He came to every battle with the eagerness of a male virgin.

It would have been easy to have gotten Colgrave. He was so vulnerable. Crippled as he was, he was no infighter. But I did not try. None of us ever did, though we all thought about it. I could see the speculation on a dozen faces then.

So easy. Kill the crazy bastard, run *Dragon* aground, and forget hunting spook ships.

You'll never do it, never do it, echoed through my mind.

Any other crew on any other ship would have strangled the insane sonofabitch ages earlier.

III

"I can see her mainsail," said Little Mica. "She's shifting sail again."

"Speed it up, Barley," said the Old Man. He put that cold eye on me as I tried to sneak my cup in again. A half pint was barely enough to warm the throat.

Better be hogsheads full on that three-master, I thought.

"Looks like she's trying for the squall," Tor called down. "I make her a Freylander. She was showing personal colors but got them in before I could read them."

Ah. That meant there was someone important aboard. They thought maybe we would not try as hard if we did not know.

Freyland lay west of Cape Blood, a dozen leagues to seaward where it came nearest the mainland. The caravel must have been making the run from Portsmouth to Songer or Ringerike, an overnight journey.

We seldom prowled the coasts of the island kingdom because the ghost ship seldom appeared there. We left Freyland to our competitors, the Trolledyngjans.

Colgrave's expression — what could be read through the scars — was deflated. Not The One. Again. Then he reconsidered. The flight and flirting with colors could be a ploy. He had done the same himself, to lull a Red Islander or Itaskian.

"Shift your heading another point to starboard," he ordered. "Bosun, come down and prepare the decks."

Lank Tor descended as agilely as an ape. Only the Kid scrambled through the rigging more quickly. But Kid sometimes fell.

A loud thump on the maindeck, waking you in the night, told you he had been showing off again.

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As Tor hit the deck he began growling orders through a grin of anticipation.

He enjoyed those bloodlettings. They were the only times he felt alive. The boring interim periods were the devil's price he paid for his moments of bloody ecstasy. The lulls were not bad for him, though. His memory was so weak it seldom reached back to our last conquest.

One of his mates began issuing weapons. I took a cutlass, went below for the bow and arrows I kept by my hammock, then repaired to my station on the forecastle deck. I was the best archer aboard. My job was to take out their helmsman and officers.

"I'd shoot a lot straighter with a little more grog in me," I grumbled to Whaleboats, who had charge of the forward grappling hooks.

"Couldn't we all. Couldn't we all." He laughed. "Talk about your straight shooting. I ever tell you about the thriteen-year-old I had in Sacuescu? Don't know where she learned, but she came well trained. Positive nympho. Male relatives didn't approve, though." He drew back his left sleeve to expose a long jagged scar on the roll of muscle outside the shoulder socket. "Two hundred fifty yards, and me running at the time."

I daydreamed while pretending interest. He had told the story a hundred times. Without improving it, the way most of us did. I don't think he remembered having told it before.

No imagination, Whaleboats.

The sea ran in long, yard-tall, polished jade swells. Not a fleck of white. No depth. I could not see in. It must have been calm for days. There was none of the drifting seaweed usually torn up by the Cape's frequent storms.

The next one would be bad. They always were when they save their energies that way.

The ship's pitch and roll were magnified on the forecastle deck, which was twenty feet above the main. My stomach began to protest. I should have saved the danmed grog for later.

But then there would have been less room for spirits from the caravel.

The wind was rising, shifting. We were nearing the squall. Little rills scampered over the larger swells.

We were getting nearer Cape Blood, too. I could hear the muted growling of the surf, could make out the geysers thrown up when a breaker crashed in between rocks, shattered, and hurled itself into the sky.

The caravel was less than a mile away. She was showing her stern now, but we had her. Just a matter of patience.

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Barley and Priest came up, leading several of the best fighters. It looked like Colgrave planned to board forecastle to sterncastle. That was all right by me. It was all over but the killing, once we seized their helm.

Whaleboats spit over the rail. He was so unkempt he was disreputable even among us. "Maybe there'll be women," he mused. "Been a long time since we took one with women."

"Save one for the Virgin." I chuckled. That was the Kid's other name. It got used mostly when somebody was baiting him.

Whaleboats laughed too. "But of course. First honors, even." Then his face darkened. "One of these days we're going to catch another wizard."

They had tried it before.

It was our one great fear. Battles we could win when they were man against man and blade against blade. We were the meanest fighters on the western ocean. We had proven it a hundred times. But against sorcery we had no protection save the grace of the gods.

"Itaskia. We've hurt them most. They'll send out a bait ship with a first-rate witch-man aboard. Then what good our luck?"

"We managed before."

"But never again. I might take Student up on it." He did not say what.

The pirates of the Red Isles had tried it. It had been a close thing. We had been lucky, that time, that Colgrave was too crazy to run. Barley had gotten the sorcerer an instant before he could unleash a demon that would have scattered *Dragon* over half the Western Ocean.

Our competitors in the islands were not fond of us at all. We showed their vessels the same mercy we gave any others.

Each man of us prayed that we would find The One before some eldritch sea-fate found us.

I could make out faces on the caravel. Time to get ready. I opened their waterproof case and carefully considered my arrows. They were the best, as was my bow. Worth a year's hire for most men. Time was, I had made their price hiring them, and myself, out for a month.

I studied, I touched, I dithered. I finally selected the grey shaft with the two red bands.

Whaleboats observed the ritual with amusement, having failed to entice anyone into a wager on which I would choose. I always took the same one in the end. It was my luckiest shaft. I had never missed with it.

Someday I would exchange arrows with the archer aboard the phantom. They said he was sure death inside three hundred yards. I did not believe he could possible be

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as deadly as I as long as I had the banded lady.

It would be interesting, if dangerous, meeting him.

The caravel was trying to trim her canvas. One of the cutlass men guffawed and shouted, "Fart in them! That'll give you all the wind you need."

I wondered what it was like to look over the taffrail and see certain death bearing down. And know there was not a thing you could do but wait for it.

IV

The caravel ran straight away, under full canvas. But the gap narrowed steadily. I could make out details of weapons and armor. "They've got soldiers aboard!"

"Uhm. A lot of them." That was Tor, who had the sharpest eyes on *Vengeful D.* He had known for some time, then.

I turned. The Old Man had clambered up to the poop, stood there looking like some dandified refugee from Hell.

"'Bout close enough for you to do your stuff," said the boatswain, tapping my shoulder.

"Yeah?" It was a long, long shot. Difficult even with the banded arrow. Pitch, roll, yaw. Two ships. And the breeze playing what devil's games in between? I took my bow from its case.

It was worth a year's pay to most men. A magnificent instrument of death. It had been designed solely for the killing of men and custom-crafted to my hands and muscles. I ran my fingertips lightly over its length. For a long time the weapon had been my only love.

I had had a woman once, but she had lost out to the bow.

I bent it, strung it, took out the banded arrow.

They were making it difficult over there, holding up shields to protect their helmsman. They had recognized us.

The banded lady never missed. This time was no exception. At the perfect instant she lightninged through a momentary gap between shields.

The caravel heeled over as she went out of control. She slowed as her sails spilled wind. Panic swept her poop. We raced in.

Colgrave bellowed subtle course changes at our own helmsman. Our sails came in as we swept up.

One by one, I sped my next eleven shafts. Only two failed finding their mark. One was the treacherous blue and white I had threatened to break and burn, it seemed, a thousand times.

The Old Man brought our bows alongside their stern with a touch so deft the hulls barely kissed, as Barley, Priest, and their party leapt over. The shambles I had made of the other poop left no contest. We

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controlled her immediately.

Sails cracked and groaned as both vessels took them in. Our bows crept past the Freylander's waist.

Whaleboats threw his grapnel. I helped heave on the line.

Screaming, our men poured over the maindeck rail to assault the mob awaiting them. They were regular soldiers, Freylander troops tempered in a hundred skirmishes with Trolledyngjan raiders. Once Whaleboats made fast, I resumed plying my bow, using scavenged Freylander arrows.

Crude things, they were unfit to caress a weapon like mine. No wonder they had not harmed any of us.

I dropped a score into the melee, probing for officers and sergeants, then took out a bothersome pair of snipers in the caravel's rigging. They had been plinking at the Old Man, who stood like a gnarled tree defying a storm, laughing as arrows streaked around him.

He would be some match for the dead captain of the phantom.

The caravel's poop was clear. Barley and Priest were holding the ladders against counterattacks from below. The men with them threw things at the crowd on the maindeck. I decided to recover my arrows before some idiot trampled them, went aft.

The uproar was overwhelming. Shouts. Clanging weapons. Shrieks of pain. Officers and sergeants thundering contradictory orders. The sides of the vessels ground together as the seas rolled on beneath them. And the Old Man still laughed crazily on the poop. He and I were the only ones who remained aboard.

He nodded. "As always, well done."

I gave him an *it was nothing* shrug. When the sterncastles rolled together, I jumped across.

My feet came down in a pool of blood, skidded away. Down I went, my head bounding off the rail.

Colgrave laughed again.

It was nearly over by the time I came around. A handful of soldiers were defending a hatchway forward. Most of our men were pitching corpses overboard. They were eying that hatchway hungrily. Feminine wailing came from behind it. Priest and Barley were getting ready for the final rush.

I staggered up, planning to help with a few well placed arrows.

Damn! My head! And the Freylander seemed to be rolling badly.

It was not my imagination. The squall was closer. It would arrive in a few hours.

That was time enough for recreation. And to find the grog.

V

It had been another of those

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good battles. I sipped from a quart tankard I had found in the Freylander captain's cabin. No serious injuries for our boys. Lots of cuts and scratches, a bashed head here and a broken finger there. Nothing permanent. The gods must, as Colgrave claimed, have favored our mission. They seldom allowed any of us to come to harm.

The men were having a grand time down on the maindeck. Twelve women. A genuine princess and her ladies-in-waiting. What Whaleboats called a jackpot ship. The Virgin, I saw, was not anymore. He abandoned his conquest, scrambled into the Freylander's rigging, began dancing on a yardarm. He was naked from the waist down.

His sureness in the tops, his fearlessness, was his great talent. He showed it off too much.

Whaleboats, a priceless keg of Daimiellian brandy under one arm, a woman's satin bolster under the other, joined me on the poop. "Another master stroke." He nodded toward Colgrave, who still stalked *Dragon's* poop, muttering, cursing the luck that kept him from finding The One.

Student joined us, glancing at Whaleboats questioningly. Whaleboats shrugged.

Student had found himself some new books. "Squall's moving in," he observed. The water had become a bluish grey showing freckles and stripes of white. The seas were running closer together.

"Going to be a blue-assed bitch of a storm," I prophesied. "The way it's taking its time."

Little Mica was the next of the clique to arrive. He was half-naked, sweat-wet. "The chunky one's not bad." He grinned. His performance had been up to brags.

He was carrying several pounds of gold and silver. We had collected a lot in our time. So much we used it for ballast. Once we found and destroyed The One, we planned to return landside as rich as princes.

"That fool Kid's gonna break his neck yet."

He was hopping on one foot, on the tip of the yard, while hosing spurts of piss into the gap between ships.

He suddenly yelled wildly, threw up an arm, bounced his butt off the yard and plunged seaward, limbs flailing. The seamen roared as he did a perfect belly-buster. The ships nudged together. Everyone not otherwise occupied manned the rail.

"I told you . . ."

"Hold it." The Old Man was peering intently with his one eye. I saw it too, then. Coming out of an arm of the squall that had reached landward north of us. Two of them. "Longships. Trolledyngjans."

They were no more than three

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miles away. Their sails were fat with wind and distinct as they spotted us and altered course. One was a black sail bearing a scarlet wolf's head. The other was a yellow-red striped one bearing a black ax.

They were coming after us. Already they were putting their shields on their gunwales and taking in their sails so they could unstep their masts. They looked quick and practiced. Old hands.

Gloating, no doubt, about having caught a competitor with his pants down.

The Old Man bellowed, bellowed, bellowed. Not much sense came through, but the men, drunk though they were, reacted. A storm of booty flew from vessel to vessel. Fat Poppo chucked the naked princess over. She screeched as she bounced on her shapely little derriere. Lank Tor, laughing, planted a slobbery, wine-dark kiss on her tender young lips, tossed her back. He clouted Poppo when the fat man protested.

"Fire time," said Student. He looked at Whaleboats in a way that must have had meaning. My friend hurried down the ladder after him.

In moments cutlasses were chopping at lines. Bow and arrows in one hand, half empty tankard in the other, I watched the deck force make sail. They kept tripping over plunder.

When the proper combination of rolls arrived, I casually stepped from rail to rail without losing a drop of my drink.

"Fo'c'sle," Colgrave growled. I nodded. "Wolf's Head first." I was not so far gone that I could not remember which had been which before they had gotten their sails in.

The Old Man was going to fight. Of course. He always fought. He would fight if the whole damned Itaskian Navy were coming down. He believed in his mission and that he was invincible because the gods were on his side.

The northmen were just a mile away when we finally got under way. Their oars worked with the swift precision of a centipede's legs.

Old hands. They needed no drummer to keep the cadence. They would be tough fighters.

Smoke poured from the Freylander. Naked women reached out to us, pleading.

"She's not burning right," said Mica, who had followed me to the forecastle.

As we drew away, the women abandoned the rail, began scurrying around with buckets.

"Student and Whaleboats better keep out of the Old Man's way," I replied. Colgrave would not be pleased.

He set a course angling seaward, squallward, across the bows of the Trolledyngjans. Any fugitive would have done the same, hoping

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to evade their first rush and get into the weather before they could come round and overhaul. The ax ship sheered to cut us off and to maneuver so they could board us over both rails. Less than a half mile separated us.

Old hands, yes, but they did not know us. They must have been used to working the coasts of Freyland. Seemed to me there was a good chance they had come over specially to take the fish we had caught already. There was a big king at Songer, and a scattered gaggle of smaller ones who, nominally, owed him allegiance. The little kings plotted against the big one, and one another, constantly. They were not above tipping the Trolledyngjans to an opportunity to plunder their rivals.

Politics is one specialized field of sin I haven't the wit to comprehend.

A quarter mile. I caressed the banded arrow. Except for Mica, she and I were alone this time. Any fighting would take place on the maindeck because the longships had such a low freeboard. And it would involve only the ax ship. I kissed the arrow. After all our time together, I thought, we were finally going to part.

Time. The Old Man threw the helm over hard. *Dragon* staggered. The sails rumbled and cracked as they spilled wind.

I sent the banded arrow on her final flight. Ever faithful, as that slut of a wife in Itaskia could not be, she sped to the northern helmsman's heart. He sagged against his rudder arm. Wolf's head heeled and bucked.

We took her directly amidships, our bows surging up and over, grinding and crunching her into driftwood and halves. Her mast, which had been shipped lengthwise atop her deck thwarts, levered up, speared through, and tangled in our sprit rigging. As we ploughed the wreckage, we staggered and shuddered like a fat lady donning a corset.

Little Mica yipped. A huge, incredibly hairy barbarian with mad blue eyes came up the mast one-handed, lugging an immense battle-ax. He sprang over the rail, howled. While he chased Mica, I dug up a boathook, than smacked him behind the ear. He was so huge it took both of us to dump him overboard. The water revived him. He splashed, cursed. The last I saw of him, he was swimming strongly toward the Freylander.

Our turn brought us round on a southerly course once more. We plowed through the wreckage. I stared down at bearded warriors busy drowning, clinging to debris, calling for help. The other Trolledyngjan had turned to pick up survivors but had second

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thoughts now that we were coming back.

They surely thought we were berserkers then, mad killers. Losing some of the precision they had shown earlier, they stepped their mast, made sail, and fled toward the squall.

I groaned, rubbed my stomach in anticipation. Colgrave would not turn loose. No matter that we were shipping water forward and a dozen men had to go to the pumps. No matter that we were drunk on our asses and exhausted from a battle already fought. He had been challenged. He would respond if it meant chasing the Trolledyngjan off the edge of the world.

VI

The waves stood taller and taller, the sea became leadish grey with ever more white running the ridges and faces of the swells. Spray salted my lips even there on the forecastle deck. *Dragon* bucked and rolled, her timbers protesting. Splatters of rain beaded on the decks. The air grew cooler. The Trolledyngjan entered the squall and gradually faded from visibility.

This was more her sort of weather. Her high, curved bows, broad beam, and shallow draft made it possible for her to ride up and down even the most awesome waves — as long as she met them bow on. With her low freeboard she could ship a lot of water fast. I suspected she would put out a sea anchor once she was safely concealed in the storm.

Dragon's altitude, fore and aft, had not been designed with waves in mind. The castles were meant to provide an advantage in battle. They made us a tad top-heavy and wind-vulnerable. In rough weather they existed solely to compound my misery.

There was a lot of wind in that squall. And Colgrave had reduced sail only as much as absolutely compelled by the need to keep *Dragon* from being torn apart. The rigging crackled, screamed, groaned, as if a hundred demons were partying there. A topsail tore with a *sh-whack!* like the fist of a giant whooshing into a stone wall, began popping and cracking in the gale. Only ribbons remained by the time they got it in.

The Kid was up there, helping cut parts free. Some thoughtful soul had remembered to fish him out as we were getting under way. He was a lucky little bastard.

I was rather pleased. Though he had little use for me, I liked him. As much as I liked anyone. He reminded me of myself when I was a lot younger.

He knew that he had been lucky. He was not clowning anymore. He was even using a safety harness.

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I collected my weapons and cases. I had to take them below and care for them. Moisture and salt could ruin them forever. Colgrave did not protest. Everyone else, cook included, had to drop everything to work ship, but I was exempted. I was the thunderbolt, the swift, deadly lightning, that determined the course of battles the moment they were joined. Colgrave did not value me as a human being, but he did value my skills and weapons.

The seas were thirty feet tall and grey-black when I dragged myself back topside. My guts were flooding back and forth between my toes and ears. But I had to help with the work. We had reached a point where we were not only pursuing our mad captain's mission, we were fighting to survive.

Every man had found some way to rope himself to his station. Floods raged round the tossing decks, threatening anyone not securely tied. It was a long, watery walk home.

A caravel was not designed to endure that.

I staggered, splashed around, lost a stomach full, snagged the rail in time to save myself. Fat Poppo handed me a safety line. I joined the men trying to control the canvas the Old Man insisted we show.

Lank Tor, the crazy bastard, was in the crow's nest, watching for the Trolledyngjan. He should have been down on the maindeck showing off his sea wisdom, not up there proving he had a pig-iron gut. My stomach revolted just at the thought of being up where the mast's height magnified motion horrendously.

We did not regain contact till the weak light began fading from the grey, thick storm. In the interim I found too much time to think and remember, to be haunted by the woman in Itaskia.

She had not been bad, as wives went, but had been short on understanding. And too willful. The conclusion of the El Murid wars had made jobs for bowmen scarce. You had needed to be related to someone. I had not been. And had not known anything else but farming. I had had enough of that as a boy. She had nagged about the money. It had been good in the war years and she had developed tastes to suit. So I had done a spot of work for Duke Greyfells. Some men had died. She had sensed their blood on my hands. That had led to more nagging, of course. There is just no pleasing them. Whatever you try, it's wrong. It had gotten so bad that I had started spending more time at the Red Hart than in our tenement room.

In alcohol I had found surcease, though more from a critical self than from a wife who, despite making her points in the most

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abrasive manner possible, had been right. But a man can't shake the pain he carries around inside him. All he can do is try deadening it. In my case that just made the wife situation worse.

There had come an evening when I arrived home early — or late, considering I had been gone three days — and had learned how she had been able to maintain our standard of living, how she had been obtaining the silver I stole to maintain my alcoholic tranquillity.

It had been a double blow. A gut-wrecker and a rabbit punch. Your wife is seeing someone else. That is a decker, but you can get up and learn to live with it. But when you find out that there has been a parade, and you're living 'off the proceeds . . .

I swear by the Holy Stones, for all our troubles, I never laid a hand on that woman before, not even when roaring drunk. Not once, even provoked.

A couple of men died, and the woman, and I went on the run, bitter, never quite sure just what had come over me, why, or what it had all been about. Not long afterward, Colgrave had scavenged me off a ship he had taken and shanghaied me as replacement for a man who had been washed overboard earlier.

There were sixty-eight stories as shameful, or worse, lurking aboard The *Vengeful D.* Few of us talked about them. The Old Man's tale, if he had one, was his alone. All we knew was the story about the fire.

Student, though, thought he had guessed it. And claimed he knew how to get off *Dragon,* to where he wanted to be. He caused a lot of frowns and nervous questions when he talked like that.

He never would elaborate.

VII

The men were grumbling seditiously by the time we spied the Trolledyngjan again. For hours we had been pushing westward, either into the heart of the ocean or onto the rocky coasts of southern Freyland. We had left the waters we knew far behind. Though not one of us had been ashore in a long time, we liked it handy just in case. We were not deep-water sailors. Losing all touch seemed a nightmare.

Colgrave stood on the poop like a statue, staring straight ahead, as if he could see through the spray and waves and rain. Reports of cracked planking, broken frames, and water gushing in as fast as the pumpers could bail, bothered him not at all. He persevered. That, if any one word ever did, encapsulated him perfectly. He persevered.

Dragon larked about on the shoulders of seas as huge as leviathans.

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"I see her!" Lank Tor cried. How? I wondered. I could barely see *him*. But it was my cue. Daring the vengeful sea, I recovered my weapons, repaired to the forecastle deck.

I could see her from there. She was a specter fading in and out almost dead ahead.

The problem was the size of the seas. She swooped down one side like a gull diving, vanished in a trough, then staggered up the next wave like an old man in an uphill race. Her sail had been torn to tatters. Her crew had been unable to unstep the mast. Now they huddled on their oar benches, trying to keep their bows into the waves. They had no protection from Mother Ocean's worst. They were brave, hardy men. What would they do if she swamped?

I never had much use for Priest. But when he clambered up to join me, he looked so puzzled and pathetic that I could not ignore him. "What's up?"

"Whaleboats and Student. They're gone."

"Gone? What do you mean, gone?" Whaleboats. My only friend. He could not abandon me.

Where the hell could he go? *Dragon's* rails were the edge of our world.

"Over the side, I guess. Where else? Nobody has seen them since they fished the Kid out." He paused, stared at the sea with the look that usually presaged a sermon. Awe, I think you could call it. "The Old Man wanted to talk to them. About why the Freylander didn't burn. One-Hand Nedo says he saw them dump most of the oil into the drink instead of on the deck."

"Whaleboats?" Student, maybe. He had been spooky, unpredictable. But not the biggest woman-hater on the *Vengeful D.* The screams of a tormented female had been like the voices of harps to Whaleboats.

"Yes."

"Strange. Very strange." The man who had fished the Kid out of the drink at Dunno Scuttair had also gone over the side within a few hours. Was the Kid a jinx? I did not think so. Losing someone was unusual, but not unprecedented. In fact, the Old Man had kept the Kid mostly because we had lost another man a week earlier.

And the rebellion? Their failure to fire a captured vessel? That was beyond my comprehension.

"Whaleboats? Really?"

There had to have been more there than met the eye. I could feel it. It was something outside the normal ken, something almost supernatural. The same something that had gotten Priest into such a state.

I could sense some terribly important revelation hovering on the

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marches of realization, teasing, taunting, a butterfly of truth on gossamer wings. Gods were trying to touch me, to teach me. I pictured Student's dusky face, peeping over the inevitable book. His eyes were merry with the mockery he had always shown when he hinted around his secret.

Maybe he *had* known the way home. But miles at sea, amidst a storm, seemed a strange place and time to start the journey. There was nothing off *Dragon* but drowning and the teeth of fishes.

Or had they swum to the Freylander? They could have expected no mercy from possible rescuers.

Nobody died on the *Vengeful D.* Not in my memory, anyway, though that gets cloudier as it goes back toward my coming aboard. The battles might be fierce, gruesome, and bloody. The decks might become scarlet and slippery. Toke, who doubled as our surgeon (a profession he once had pursued), might stay busy for days sewing wounds, cauterizing, and setting bones, but none of us passed into the hands of Priest for burial with the fishes. All his prayers he had to save for the souls of our enemies.

We, like *Dragon* herself, wore a thousand exotic scars, but, as Colgrave said, the gods themselves guarded us. Only restless, treacherous Mother Ocean could steal a soul from *Vengeful D.*

It was no wonder the Old Man could hurl ship and crew against odds that would have assured mutiny on the most disciplined Itaskian man-o'-war. We believed ourselves immortal. Excepting Old Barley, we dreaded only the completion of our quest and the wizard trap that someone, someday, surely would spring.

What would become of our band of cutthroats if we found The One, or if the gods withdrew their favor?

We closed with the Trolledyngjan. Descending darkness, more than the storm, obscured her now. Still, when we were both at wave crest, I could see the pale faces of their chieftains. They showed fear, but also that dogged determination to die fighting that animates all northmen. We could expect them to turn on us soon.

A *creak-clump* sound drew my attention. The Old Man had come forward. How he had managed, I could not guess. He leaned on the rail while we ran up and down several watery mountains. The ship's motion did not discomfit him at all.

My guts were so knotted that it had become impossible for me to keep heaving them up.

"Can you do it?" he finally asked. "The helmsman?"

I shrugged. "In this? I don't know. I can try." Anything to end

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the chase and get *Dragon* out of that grey sea hell. He would not break off till we had made our kill.

"Wait for my signal." In a journey that was almost an epic, he returned to the poop. As darkness thickened, he brought *Dragon* more and more abreast of the Trolledyngjan.

She crested. He signaled. I sped my second-best shaft.

She was not the banded lady. She wobbled in the gale, failed the clean kill.

The helmsman had to drown with the others.

Out of control, the Trolledyngjan turned sideways as she slid into a trough, broached.

She survived one wave, but the next swamped her.

One arrow. One deadly shaft well sped, and our part was over. The terrible, terrible sea would do the rest.

Now we could concentrate on surviving. And I could look forward to respite from that constant soar and plunge.

VIII

Smooth sailing was a long time coming. We had to wait for a lull before putting about, lest we share the northmen's fate. Then we drove back into it, the wind an enemy as vicious as the waves. We made headway only slowly. Three torturous days groaned past before we staggered through a rainy curtain and saw land and quieter seas once more.

The Old Man's dead reckoning was uncanny. He brought us back just two leagues south of Cape Blood.

But the caravel, that we had halfway hoped to find still adrift, had vanished. We would get no chance to finish plundering her.

Colgrave growled, "Tor, up top. Quick now." He surveyed the sea suspiciously.

Someone had come along. There was no other explanation. The caravel was not on the rocks. And those women, courtiers all, could never have worked ship well enough to have sailed her away. Itaskians summoned by the coast watchers? Probably.

They could be hanging around.

The work began. *Dragon* had taken a vicious pounding. She was leaking at a hundred seams. We had cracked planks forward from the ramming of the Trolledyngjan. Their condition had been worsened by days of slamming into heavy seas. The rigging looked like something woven in a mad war between armies of drunken spiders. Dangling cables, torn sheets, broken spars were everywhere aloft. We needed to pull the mizzenmast and step a spare, and to replace the missing foretopmast. We had enough replacements on board, but

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would have to plunder new spares off our next victim.

And stores. We had not gotten much off the Freylander.

What had become of the keg Whaleboats had plundered, I wondered. I doubted that he had taken it over the side with him.

That was a good sign. I do not worry about alcohol when I'm seasick.

We had the mizzen half pulled, the foretop cleared, sails scattered everywhere for Mica's attention, and half the lines and cables down.

It was the perfect time.

And the enemy came.

As always, Lank Tor saw her first. She came out of the foul weather hugging the cape. Matter of factly, he announced, "Galleon, ho. Two hundred fifty tonner, Itaskian naval ensign."

Equally calmly, Colgrave replied, "Prepare for action, bosun. Keep the repair materials on deck." He climbed to the poop. "And watch for more."

It was my turn. "Signals ashore. Mirrors, looks like." There were flashes all along the coast.

"Coast watchers. They'll be calling everything out of Portsmouth." Colgrave resumed his laborious climb.

We wasted no time trying to run. In our state it was hopeless. We had to fight, and count on our fabulous luck.

"Could be three, four hundred men on one of those," Barley muttered as he stalked past with the grog bucket. He was so damned scared I expected him to wipe them out single-handedly.

"Sail!" someone cried.

A little slooplike vessel, long, low, lateen-rigged, had put out from a masked cove. No threat.

"Messenger boat," said Fat Poppo, who had been in the Itaskian Navy at one time. "She'll log the action and carry the report to the Admiralty."

We did not like one another much, we followers of the mad captain's dream, but we were a team. We made ready with time to spare.

The Itaskian came on as if she intended ramming.

She did! She was making a suicide run with the messenger standing by, if needed, to collect survivors.

The Old Man bent on a maintopsail and a storm spritsail, just enough to give us steerage way. At precisely the appropriate instant, he dodged.

The galleon rolled past so closely we could have jumped to her decks. She was crammed with marines. The snipers in her rigging showered me with crossbow bolts.

I leaned back and roared with laughter. Their best effort had but creased my right seaboot.

Each of my shafts took out a

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Crown officer. Our men drew blood with a storm of javelins.

To ram had been their whole plan. Going away in failure, they seemed at a loss.

Wigwag signals came from the sloop. They were in a cipher Poppo could not read.

"They'll be back," Priest predicted. It was no great feat of divination.

Already they were taking in sail, preparing to come about. This time they would not roar past like a mad bull.

"Find me some arrows!" I demanded. "Tor . . ."

"On the way," the boatswain promised, gaze fixed on the Itaskian.

I touched the hilt of my cutlass. It had been a long time since I had had to use one. I expected to this time, though. We had to take that galleon so I could recover my arrows. And get at their grog. Itaskians always carried a stock.

Our luck had held that far. There was but one casualty during the first pass. The Kid. He had fallen out of the rigging again. He was just dazed and winded. He would be all right.

The crazy little bastard should have broken every bone in his body.

The moment the Itaskian was clear, Tor put everyone to work.

Colgrave was crazier than I thought. He meant to try dodging till we completed repairs.

They let us get away with it one more time. They had little choice, really. We had the wind. I put down as many officer-killing shafts as I could. But they were prepared for me. Their decision makers remained hidden while they were in range.

The repair parties succeeded in one thing: freeing most of the men from the pumps. We needed them.

Third time past, the Itaskian sent over a storm of grappling hooks. Despite flailing axes and busy swords and my carefully targeted arrows, they pulled us in, made us fast.

It began in earnest.

How long had it been since we had had to fight on our own decks? I could not remember the last time. But Itaskian marines overran the rail, swarmed aboard, coming and coming over the piles of their own dead. My god, I thought, how many of them are there? The galleon had them packed in like cattle.

I expected them to drive for our castles, to take out Colgrave and myself, but they disappointed me. The point of their assault was the mainmast.

I soon saw why. A squad of sailors with axes went to work on it.

The Old Man thundered at Barley and Priest. They went after the axmen. But the Itaskian marines kept ramparts of flesh in their path.

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It was up to me. Ignoring the endless sniper fire, I sped arrow after arrow. That eventually did the trick, but not before they had injured the mainmast grievously.

A grappling hook whined past my nose. What now?

The Itaskian sailors still aboard the galleon were throwing line after line to tangle in our rigging.

It was insane. Suicidally insane. No ship, knowing us, tried to make it impossible for us to get away. No. Even the proudest, the strongest, made sure *they* could escape.

At least two hundred dead men littered *Dragon's* decks. Blood poured from our scuppers. And still the Royal Marines clambered over the hills of their fallen.

What drove them so?

The assault's direction shifted from the mainmast to the forecastle. Despite vigorous resistance, the Itaskians broke through to the ladders. I downed as many snipers as I could before, putting my bow carefully out of harm's way, I drew my cutlass and began slashing at helmeted heads.

It had been a long time, but my hand and arm still knew the rhythms. Parry, thrust, parry, cut. No fancy fencing. Riposte was for the rapier, a gentleman's weapon. There were no gentlemen on the *Vengeful D.* Just damned efficient killers.

The Itaskian captain sent the remnants of his sailors in after the marines. And, a grueling hour later, he came over himself, with everyone left aboard.

IX

As always, we won. As always, we left no survivors, though in the end we had to hunt a few through the bowels of their ship. An enraged Barley had charge of that detail.

The long miracle had persisted. Once those of us who were able had thrown the Itaskians to the fishes, it became apparent that not one man had perished. But several wished that they had.

I paused by Fat Poppo, who was begging for someone to kill him. There was not an inch of him that was not bloody, that had not been slashed by Itaskian blades. His guts were lying in his lap.

Instead of finishing him, I fetched him a cup of brandy. I had found Whaleboats' keg. Then, accompanied by Little Mica, who did not look much better than Poppo, I crossed to the galleon.

I wanted to find a clue to the cause of their madness. And a chance to be first at their grog.

Priest had had the same idea. He was wrecking the galley as we passed through.

Screams came from up forward. Barley had found a survivor.

We found the brig.

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"Damned," said Mica. "Ain't he a tough one?"

Behind bars was the Trolledyngjan we had thrown overboard. Must be important, I thought, or he would be sleeping with the fishes. Probably some chieftain who had made himself especially obnoxious.

My banded arrow lay in his lap.

I gaped. She had found ways to come home before, but never by such an exotic route.

Mica was impressed too. He knew what that arrow meant to me. "A sign. We'd better take him to the Old Man."

The Trolledyngjan had been eying us warily. He jumped up laughing. "Yes. Let's go see the mad captain."

Colgrave listened to what I had to say, considered. "Give him Whaleboats' berth." He turned away, eye burning a hole in the southern seascape. The messenger vessel still lay there, watching.

I returned to the Itaskian for the banded arrow's sisters.

Ordinarily I did not do much but speed the deadly shafts. I was a privileged specialist, did not have to do anything unless the urge hit me. But now everyone had to cover for those too sliced up to rise, yet too god-protected to die. Not being much use in the rigging, I manned a swab.

They had caught us good, had tangled us thoroughly. It would take all night to get free, and another day to replace the masts. The main, now, would have to go too.

"They'll be here before we're ready," said Mica, passing on some errand.

He was right. All logic said we had sailed into a trap, and even now the ladies of Portsmouth were watching the men-o'-war glide ponderously down the Silverbind Estuary.

The Old man knew. That was why he kept glaring southward. He was thinking, no doubt, that now he would never catch The One.

Me? All I wanted was to get away alive.

I hoped Colgrave still had a trick or two up his elegant sleeve.

Poppo waved weakly. I abandoned my swab to fetch him another brandy.

"Thanks," he gasped. Grinning, "I know now."

"What's that?"

"The secret. Student's secret."

"So?"

"But I can't tell you. That's part of it. You've got to figure it out yourself."

"Not Whaleboats."

"Smarter than he looked, maybe. Back to your mopping. And think about it."

I thought. But I could not get anything to click. It was a good secret. I could not even define its

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limits, let alone make out details.

It had caused Whaleboats and Student to do something completely out of character: fake the fire aboard the Freylander.

Darkness closed in. It was the most unpromising night I had ever seen. Signal fires blazed along the coast. The messenger moved closer, to keep better track of us.

Those of us who were able kept on working. By first light we had stripped the Itaskian of everything useful and had freed *Dragon.* The Old Man spread the foremain and, creeping, we made for the storm.

"There they are."

This time I paid attention to Mica. This time it was important.

Lank Tor and the Old Man, of course, had known for some time.

There were sails on the horizon. Topsails. Those of seven warships, each the equal of the one we had taken. No doubt there were smaller, faster vessels convoying them.

The messenger stayed with us, marking our slow retreat.

The gods were not entirely with us anymore. The squall line retreated as we approached, remaining tantalizingly out of reach. Soon it broke free of Cape Blood and began drifting seaward.

"We could try for Freyland . . ." I started to say, but Mica silenced me with a gesture.

There was a second squadron north of the Cape. Three fat galleons eager to make our acquaintance.

"We're had. What's that?"

Something bobbed on the waves ahead. Low, dark. Gulls squawked and flapped away as we drew nearer.

It was a harbinger of what Itaskia's navy planned for us.

Trolledyngjan's from wolf's head had managed to assemble a raft and start paddling for land. They had not made it. Itaskian arrows protruded from each corpse. The gulls had been at their faces and eyes.

"Always the eyes first," said Mica. He glanced at the wheeling birds, shivered.

"That," I said, "is the only ghost ship we're ever going to see."

The repairs went on and on. The Old Man stood the poop as stiffly as if this were just another plundering-to-be. Not till after they had drawn the noose tight did he act. And then he merely went below to change into fresher, dandier clothing.

Ten to one, and all of them bigger. How much can the gods help? But they took no chances. They surrounded us carefully, then slowly tightened their circle.

When it was almost time, I paused to speak to my banded arrow. This time, I told her, we were going to have to do a deed that would re-echo for decades. It would

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be our only immortality.

But they gave me no opportunity to employ her.

Two fat galleons moved in on our sides. We killed and killed and killed, till the sea itself turned scarlet and frothed with the surging to and fro of maddened sharks. They cut us up one by one till, like Fat Poppo, we could do nothing but squat in our own gore and watch the destruction of our shipmates.

The first pair of vessels eventually pulled away so another pair could put their marines aboard. And so on. And so on. Such determination. That Freylander must have been far more important than we had thought.

There came a time when I was alone on the forecastle, Colgrave was alone on the poop, and the Kid was alone in the rigging. Then even we had been cut down.

The Itaskians cleared their countless dead while, unable to interfere, we lay in our own blood. Would they fire us, as we had done to so many victims? No. Gangs of sailors came over and took up the repair work we had started.

I supposed they were planning to take us into Portsmouth. Our trials and executions would make a huge spectacle.

It would be the event of the decade.

X

The Itaskians worked a day and a night. Dawn proved my pain-fogged speculations unfounded.

The messenger ship then drew alongside. Just one man came aboard. He wore the regalia of a master sorcerer of the Brotherhood.

This was the man we had feared so long, the one against whom we had no defense. His was the mind, no doubt, which had engineered our destruction. He had been subtle. Not till now had we suspected the presence of a magical hand. Knowing he was there, Colgrave might have gone another way.

He surveyed *Dragon* with a pleased look, then went aft to begin a closer inspection. He started with the Old Man.

One by one, working his way forward, he paused over each man. Finally, he climbed the forecastle ladder and bent over me.

"So. Archer," he murmured. I clutched the banded arrow beneath my broken leg and wished I had the strength to drive her into his chest. I had not felt so much rage, so much hatred, since the night that I had killed my wife. "Your long journey is almost done. You're almost there. In just a few hours you'll have your heart's desire. You'll meet your ghost ship after all."

He must have said the same thing to the others. *Dragon* fairly

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quivered with anger and hatred. Mine was so strong I half sat up before I collapsed from pain and the weight of the spells he had spun about us.

"Farewell, then,'" he chuckled. "Farewell all!" A minute later he was aboard his sloop. Her crew cast off. By then the galleons had fled beyond the southern horizon.

I could still hear his voice, singing, as the sloop pulled away. At first I thought it imagination. But it was not. He was chanting up some new sorcery. The old began to relax.

My anger broke that enchantment's limits. I rolled. I found my bow. Ignoring nerves shrieking with the pain in my leg, I surged upward.

Three hundred yards. He had his back to me, his arms raised in an appeal to the sky. "This's the flight for which you were made." I kissed the banded lady good-by.

I fell as she left the bow, cursing because I would be unable to follow her final flight.

She was faithful to the last.

The skull-pounding chant became an endless tortured scream.

All the thunders of the universe descended at once.

I had let fly seconds too late.

The first thing I noticed was the gentle whisper of the ship moving slowly through quiet seas. Then the damp fog. I rolled onto my back. The mist was so dense I could barely make out the albatross perched on the foretruck. I sat up.

There was no pain. Not even the ache of muscles tormented by the exertions of combat. I rubbed my leg. It was whole. But I had not imagined the break. There was a lump, no longer tender, at the fracture site. My cuts, scrapes, and bruises had all healed, their only memorial a few new scars.

It takes months for bones to knit, I thought.

I stood, tottered to the rail overlooking the maindeck. The bone held.

My shipmates, as puzzled as I, were patting themselves, looking around, and murmuring questions. Fat Poppo kept lifting his shirt, fingering the line across his belly, then flipping his shirt down and glancing around in embarrassed disbelief. Lank Tor stared upward, mouthing a silent "How?" over and over.

The sails were aloft and pregnant with wind.

I turned slowly, surveying the miracle. Maybe we *were* beloved of the gods, I thought.

The fog seemed less dense ahead. Light filtered through.

The Old Man sensed it too. He began clumping round the poop in suspicious curiosity, leaning on the rails, the sternsheets, trying to

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garner some hint of what had happened.

He paused, stared past me.

In a voice that was but a ghost of his usual thunder, he called Toke and Lank Tor, conferred. In a minute, quietly, they were about their work. He called to me to keep a sharp lookout.

The boatswain and First Officer took in sail.

XI

And now we drift, barely making steerage way. Every man remains self-involved in the mystery of our survival.

The fog *is* thinning. I can see the water now, like polished jade, an algae-rich soup in which the only ripples are those made by *Dragon's* cutwater.

Yet there is a breeze up top. Curious.

A dozen birds are perched in the tops, silently watching us, moving only when the Kid or another topman pushes by. Spooky.

The Old Man is as much at a loss as anyone. He is ready for anything, expects nothing good. He sends one of Tor's mates round to make sure we are all fully armed.

The fog gradually breaks into patchlets. But the low sky remains solidly overcast. It is no more than two hundred feet up. It is so thick, the light is so diffuse, that there is no telling exactly where the sun stands. Sometimes the cloud dips down, and the maintop ploughs through, swirling it like a spoon does cream in a cup of tea.

I check my arrows, mourn my banded lady. She was a truer love than any I have ever known, was faithful to the end. Not like this blue and white. She is as fickle as that bitch I killed in Itaskia.

Heart's desire. The dead sorcerer promised it. Then what am I doing here, sailing to a rendezvous with the ghost ship? A queasiness not of wind or wave stampedes through my stomach. I will face a grim opponent, if the wizard did not lie. And without my deadly lady. The bowman there, they say, is at least as good as I.

This is my desire? Then I have fooled myself more thoroughly than anyone else.

I wish I could talk to Colgrave, to make sure there aren't any last-minute changes in plan.

Like a chess opening thoroughly planned beforehand, our initial moves will go by rote. We have discussed them a hundred times. We have taken a score of vessels in dress rehearsal.

I am the Old Man's key piece, his queen. He relies on me heavily. Perhaps too heavily.

I am supposed to take out that legendary bowman first. Before he can get me. Then I take the dead captain, the helmsman, anyone

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taking their places, and, as we go hand to hand, their deadliest fighters.

Dragon's prow slices through a final cloud.

I see her! A caravel emerging from a fog bank directly ahead, bearing down on us. I wave to Colgrave.

It's Her. The One. The Phantom. I can smell it, taste it. Its taste is fear. The sorcerer did not lie. Even from here I can see the bowman on her forecastle deck, glaring our way.

The butterflies grow larger.

Colgrave shifts our heading a bit to starboard. The reever immediately does the same. We have barely got steerage way, but it seems we are rushing toward one another at the breakneck speed of tilting knights. I glance at Colgrave. He shrugs. How and when I act is up to me.

I take my second-best arrow and lay it across my bow. "Now, if you ever aspired to greatness, is the time to fly true," I whisper. My hands are cold, moist, shaky.

We proceed in near silence, each man awed by what we are about to attempt. The ghost makes not a sound as she bears down, evidently intending a firing pass similar to our own. Even the birds, usually so raucous, are still. Colgrave stands tall and stiff, refusing to make himself a difficult target. He has complete confidence in my skill and the protection of the gods.

He is positively aglow. This is the end to which he has dedicated his life.

Momentarily, I wonder what we will really do if by some chance we are the victors in this encounter. Will we beach the *Vengeful D.* and haul our treasures ashore as we have always said? But where? We must be known and wanted in every kingdom and city-state fronting the western ocean.

Four hundred yards. The phantom seems a little hazy, a little undefined. For a moment I suspect my eyes. But, no. It's true. There is an aura of the enchanted about her.

There would be, wouldn't there?

Three fifty. Three hundred yards. I could let fly now, but it does not feel right.

There is something strange about the reever, something I cannot put my finger on.

Two fifty. The crew are getting nervous. All eyes are on me now. Two hundred. I cannot wait any longer. He won't.

I loose.

As does he, at virtually the same instant.

His shaft moans past my ear, knicking it, drawing a drop of blood. I stoop for another, cursing. I missed too.

The butterflies have grown as

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big as falcons. I send a second arrow, and so does he. And we both miss, by a wider margin.

Does he have the shakes too? He is supposed to be above that, is supposed to be far better than he has shown. The Phantom has never met a foe she needed fear.

But she has never met us. Perhaps fear is why we have never been able to track her down. Perhaps she has heard how terrible her stalkers can be.

One fifty. I miss twice more. Now it has become a matter of pride. He can miss forever, so far as I'm concerned, but I've got a reputation to uphold and a nervous crew to reassure.

Another miss. And another. Damned! What is wrong with me?

Student's mocking grin comes haunting. I frown. Why now?

One hundred yards. Toe to toe. And I'm down to just one arrow. Might as well kiss it all good-by. We have lost. This feckless blue and white will miss by a mile.

But a dead calm comes over me. Disregarding my opponent, who, I suppose, has been toying with me, I ready the shot with tournament care.

It goes.

A thunderbolt strikes me in the chest. The bow slides from my fingers. The crew moan. I clutch the arrow . . .

A blue and white arrow.

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I can hear Student laughing now. And, with blood dribbling from the corners of my mouth, I grin back. So that's his secret.

It's a good one. A cosmic joke. The sort that sets the gods laughing till their bellies ache and then, ever after, when they remember, is good for a snicker.

My opponent falls as I fall. I wind up seated with my back against the rail, watching as the grapnels fly, as the ships come together, as the faces of the men portray a Hell's gallery of reactions.

I suppose we'll drift at the heart of this circular mile forever, tied to ourselves, to our sins.

It's too late for redemption now.

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F&SF COMPETITION

REPORT ON COMPETITION 18

In the December issue we asked competitors to transpose two or more words in the title of an sf work. This one had even more repeats than usual; there was hardly a unique entry in the lot. The winners were judged by the overall quality of their entries, and some repeats appear among the winners' entries below.

Everyone submitted Zelazny's *Sand In The Doorways,* which we'll admit has an evocative ring to it. Even such an offbeat entry as *Who the _____ Sold the Moon, Man* was a repeat. Other popular ones were: *Wage of The Purple Riders, City of the Squares, Who Can A Man Replace?* and *Unicorn of the Year.* A subcategory of "best" collections emerged, ranging from *The Knight of Damon Best* to *The John of Campbell W. Best* to, inevitably, *The Dick of Philip K. Best.* Shame.

FIRST PRIZE:
Campbell's *There Goes Who?*
Sturgeon's *Well Sturgeon Is Alive and . . .*
Heinlein's *Rolling the Stones*
Asimov's *Asimov the Early*
Matheson's *Born of Man, Woman and*
—Marc Russell

SECOND PRIZE
Clarke's *Tales White From the Hart*
Burrough's *Ant Tarzan and the Men*
Henderson's *The Different People: No Flesh*
Lundwall's *What About Science: It's All Fiction*
—Wes and Lynn Pederson

RUNNERS UP
Dick's *The High In the Castle, Man*
Amis' *Hell of New Maps*
Moorcock's *Ruins in the Breakfast*
Silverberg's *Inside Dying*
—Harvey Abramson

The Sturgeon of Theodore Best
Asimov's *The Trilogy Foundation*
Anderson's *Me Call Joe*
—Al Sarantonio

Twain's *Court A Yankee In King Arthur's Connecticut*
Wyndham's *Triffids of the Day*
Silverberg's *The Line Up*
Lewis' *Planet of the Silent Out*
—Donald Franson

Capek's *URR*
Russ's *It Changed? When?*
Moore's *Eye the Girl With Rapid Movements*
—Jeremy Hole

HONORABLE MENTIONS
Dick's *We Can Wholesale It For You, Remember?*
Silverberg's *Dead With The Born*
O'Donnell's *Empty the People*
—Barry N. Malzberg

Herbert's *The Frank Worlds of Herbert*
Ellison's *Gentleman and Other Junkie Stories of the Hung-up Generation*
—David Lubar

Miller's *For Leibowitz A Canticle*
Tevis's *The Earth Man Who Fell To*
—Dennis D'Asaro

Lafferty's *Mothers Nine Hundred Grand*
Moskowitz's *Light Science Fiction by Gas*
—Bud Nrtn

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Zelazny's *And Conrad . . . Call Me*
Heinlein's *Into the Summer Door*
—*Allen Cohen*

Brunner's *Double, Double*
Harrison's *The Technicolor Time Machine*
—*Dennis Lien*

COMPETITION 19 (thanks to Christopher Leithiser)

Submit a maximum of three limericks with a science fiction theme and incorporating a science fiction title into the last line, e.g.:

Oh, the life of a shrink is not fun
When he treats his computerized son
But Doc Auberson knows
That the troubles arose
From a trauma *When Harlie Was One.*

Since the android just couldn't keep pace
With humanity's energy race,
He decided to keep
His electrical sheep
Fully charged on *The Currents of Space.*

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by May 10. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize, Six different hard cover science fiction books. Second prize, 20 different sf paperbacks. Runners-up will receive one-year subscriptions to F&SF, Results of Competition 19 will appear in the September issue.

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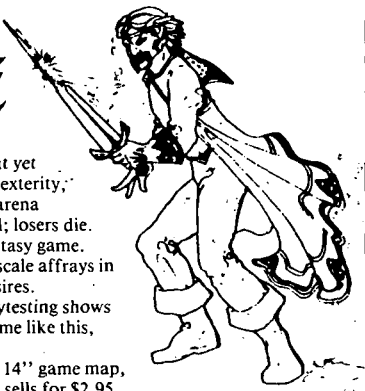

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Game design by Steve Jackson
Illustrations by Liz Danforth

The Fantasy Trip: WIZARD

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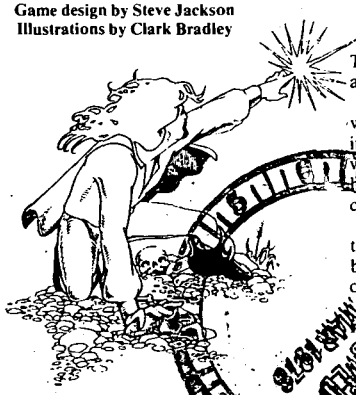

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